
13 CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCEPTIONAL LEADERS

Not all leaders in major positions of responsibility or influence are exceptional in their leadership abilities. Conversely, some of the very best leaders or managers are in positions that do not have great responsibility or influence. Some characteristics of incredible leaders come naturally....and some are learned. Bear in mind that a person need not necessarily have all these strengths to be highly effective.

Knows himself - knowing one's own strengths, weaknesses, what one likes to do and not do, are crucial insights into knowing how to work with or lead others.

Secure in who one is - this allows the person to act or react with perspective, rather than compensating for an insecurity. For example, when someone is secure, they are more apt to hire strong or smart individuals helping to create the strongest team possible.

Self-confident – as with successful athletes, self-confidence creates an atmosphere of positive expectation that contributes significantly in achieving great results. Others will expect the confident but realistic leader to be successful in reaching his/her goals; be careful that one is not over-confident or have unrealistic, unachievable goals. Arrogance is a turn-off to followers; healthy confidence is key.

Varied approach – deals with people as individuals, seeing where the person is emotionally or by perspective then uses the approach that will garner the optimum response.

Has a contagious enthusiasm – casts the vision that causes people to want to be onboard.

Authenticity – what you see is who they are; they are transparent and consistent.

Stretches people –shows confidence in people motivating them to achieve higher levels of professionalism, leadership and/or productivity.

Supports people – gives others the resources needed to do the job, encourages them to take risks and learn from failures, and stands up for his/her people.

Encourages innovation – may or may not be creative him/herself, but encourages innovation, to think “out-of-the-box” and rewards the good ideas that result.

Keeps learning - a great leader will keep learning or encourage his/her people to keep learning; to not grow or improve can result in stagnation or even regression, while the rest of the world moves ahead.

Understands how organizations work – many people never grasp how each department within an organization must work with the others in order to achieve the objective. To maximize an organization's potential, a leader must not only know how the pieces all fit together but must have grown past having any partiality for the functional area he came from.

“Big picture” perspective – top leadership must see not only the organization as a whole, but the world in which the organization functions. For example, a controller might have an accountant’s detail perspective, but could never be an effective chief financial officer without the “big picture” perspective.

Values both “process” and results – entrepreneurs (those having the courage to start up a company) have a focus on results but often don’t have patience for developing the process or systems needed for consistency or “buy-in” by others in the organization. Bureaucrats may be so risk adverse or oriented toward process that they are ineffective in getting timely results. In reality, valuing both process and results is needed.

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