



Leadership Qualities

Certain qualities belong potentially to everyone, but leaders possess these qualities to an exceptional degree. The following is a discussion of 10 qualities that mark a leader and help influence the leadership process—vision, ability, enthusiasm, stability, concern for others, self-confidence, persistence, vitality, charisma, and integrity.²²

■ **Vision.** *The first requirement for a leader is a strong sense of purpose.* A vision of what could and should be is a basic force that enables the leader to recognize what must be done and to do it. Vision inspires others and causes the leader to accept the duties of leadership, whether pleasant or unpleasant. A sense of vision is especially powerful when it embodies a common cause—overcoming tyranny, stamping out hunger, or improving the human condition.

Native Americans believe that the leader should look to the seventh generation when making decisions today, and this will ensure that a vision is sound and just. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once commented on the imaginative nature of vision, saying, “A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral.”²³

Examples of leadership vision and its power can be seen in computer pioneer Steve Jobs, who foresaw a computer on every desktop and in every home, and in business entrepreneur Bill Gates, who asked the optimistic and compelling question, Where do you want to go today? Jobs of Apple and Gates of Microsoft have altered business and society in irreversible ways.

If you are the leader of a work group or an organization, you should ask, Do I have a plan? What is my vision of what this department or organization should be?

■ **Ability.** *The leader must know the job—or invite loss of respect.* It helps if the leader has done the job before and done it well. Employees seldom respect the individual who constantly must rely on others when making decisions, giving guidance, or solving problems. Although employees usually show a great deal of patience with a new leader, they will lose faith in someone who fails to gain an understanding of the job within a reasonable period of time. Also, the leader must keep job knowledge current. Failure to keep up leads to lack of confidence and loss of employee support. Finally, a leader must have a keen mind to understand information, formulate strategies, and make correct decisions.

Leaders should ask, How competent am I? Am I current in my field? Do I set an example and serve as a resource for my employees because I keep job knowledge current? Mentally, are my perceptions accurate, is my memory good, are my judgments sound?

■ **Enthusiasm.** *Genuine enthusiasm is an important trait of a good leader.* Enthusiasm is a form of persuasiveness that causes others to become interested and willing to accept what the leader is attempting to accomplish. Enthusiasm, like other human

emotions—laughter, joy, happiness—is contagious. Enthusiasm shown by a leader generates enthusiasm in followers. As Harry Truman once said, “The successful man has enthusiasm. Good work is never done in cold blood; heat is needed to forge anything. Every great achievement is the story of a flaming heart.”²⁴
If you are a leader, you must ask, Do I care personally and deeply about what I am doing? Do I show this to my employees? Does my enthusiasm ignite others to take action?

■ **Stability.** *The leader must understand her or his own world and how it relates to the world of others.* One cannot solve the equation of others when preoccupied with the equation of self. Empathy for employees cannot be developed if the leader is emotionally involved with personal problems. Problems with alcohol, problems with money, and problems with relationships are fertile fields for emotional instability. A display of emotional instability places the leader in a precarious position with regard to employees, because they will question the leader’s objectivity and judgment. Leaving personal problems at home allows the leader to think more clearly and to perform more effectively on the job. One can see the consequences of loss of stability with examples ranging from the fall of Alexander the Great to the fall of Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny*.

The leader must ask, Do I possess objectivity? Do I convey stability to my employees? Do they trust that personal problems will not interfere with my judgment?

■ **Concern for others.** *At the heart of caring leadership is concern for others.* The leader must not look down on others or treat them as machines—replaceable and interchangeable. The leader must be sincerely and deeply concerned about the welfare of people. The character of caring stands in clear contrast to the character of bullying. The caring leader never tears down, belittles, or diminishes people. The leader must also possess humility and selflessness to the extent that, whenever possible, others’ interests are considered first. Concern for others requires patience and listening, and the result is trust, the bedrock of loyalty. Loyalty to followers generates loyalty to the leader; and when tasks become truly difficult, loyalty carries the day.

Leaders must question, Do I truly care about my employees as people, or do I view them more as tools to meet my goals? Do I ever demean people, or do I always lift them up? If I value my employees, do they know it?

■ **Self-confidence.** *Confidence in one’s ability gives the leader inner strength to overcome difficult tasks.* If leaders lack self-confidence, people may question their authority and may even disobey orders. Researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership have found that successful leaders remain calm and confident even during intense situations. By demonstrating grace under pressure, they inspire those around them to stay calm and act intelligently. According to football quarterback Roger Staubach, the key to self-confidence is how hard the leader works: “Confidence comes from hours, days, weeks, and years of preparation and dedication. When I’m in the last two minutes of a December playoff game, I’m drawing confidence from windsprints I did the previous March. It’s just a circle: work and confidence.”²⁵

A leader must ask, What is my self-confidence level? Do I show confidence in my actions? Have I done the homework and preparation needed to build self-confidence?

■ **Persistence.** *The leader must have drive and determination to stick with difficult tasks until they are completed.* According to Niccolò Machiavelli, “There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain as to success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”²⁶ Israeli prime minister Golda Meir referred to the quality of persistence when she advised that things do not just occur in one’s life. She encouraged people to *believe*, be *persistent*, and *struggle* to overcome life’s obstacles.²⁷ Leaders from Walt Disney to Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald’s, have shown the importance of persistence for business success, and military leaders from Ulysses Grant to George Patton have proved its

importance on the battlefield. However, no better example exists to show the importance of fierce resolve as a leadership quality than that of Winston Churchill. Historians agree that this leader, with his bulldog will, was a determining element in the success of the Allied nations in defeating the Axis powers in World War II. In the face of impossible odds and seemingly certain defeat, Churchill rallied his people. Simply, he would not give in; he would not give up.²⁸

If you are the leader, ask, Do I have self-drive and unflagging persistence to overcome adversity even when others lose their strength and their will?

■ **Vitality.** *Even if the spirit is willing, strength and stamina are needed to fulfill the tasks of leadership.* Effective leaders are typically described as electric, vigorous, active, and full of life, no matter how old they are or if they are physically disabled. Consider Franklin Roosevelt, who had polio, and Helen Keller, who was blind. It is interesting to note that at one point in recent history, the American president Ronald Reagan, the Roman Catholic Pope John Paul II, and the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran were all over 70 years of age—and more vital than many people half their age. At all ages, leaders require tremendous energy and stamina to achieve success. The caring leader must have health and vigor to pursue his or her goals. Physical checkups and physical fitness are common-sense acts.

Leaders must ask, Am I fit for the tasks of leadership? Do I have sufficient energy? Am I doing everything I can to keep physically strong?

■ **Charisma.** *Charisma is a special personal quality that generates others' interest and causes them to follow.* Napoleon makes the point that great leaders are optimists and merchants of hope.²⁹ Optimism, a sense of adventure, and commitment to a cause are traits found in charismatic leaders. These are qualities that unleash the potential of others and bring forth their energies. Charisma is difficult to define, but the result is admiration, enthusiasm, and the loyalty of followers. Charismatic leaders in history include Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, and Elizabeth I.

As a leader, ask yourself, Do I possess a positive outlook and commitment in my demeanor that transforms followers to new levels of performance as well as personal loyalty to me?

■ **Integrity.** *The most important quality of leadership is integrity, understood as honesty, strength of character, and courage.* Without integrity there is no trust, the number one element in the leader–follower equation. Integrity leads to trust, and trust leads to respect, loyalty, and ultimately, action. It is trust coming from integrity that is needed for leading people from the boardroom, to the shop floor, to the battlefield.³⁰ A model of integrity was George Washington, about whom it was written:

Endowed by nature with a sound judgment, and an accurate discriminating mind, he was guided by an unvarying sense of moral right, which would tolerate the employment only of those means that would bear the most rigid examination, by a fairness of intention which neither sought nor required disguise, and by a purity of virtue which was not only untainted but unsuspected.³¹

As a leader, ask, Do my people trust me? Do they know that I seek the truth and that I am true to my word? Do they see that I possess strength of character and the courage of my convictions?

How do you rate on the 10 qualities of leadership: vision, ability, enthusiasm, stability, concern for others, self-confidence, persistence, vitality, charisma, and integrity? Do you have the qualities that inspire others to follow? The following exercise will help you evaluate yourself (or a leader you know).

Exercise 2-1 Ten Leadership Qualities—How Do You Rate?

Evaluate yourself (or a leader you know) on the following leadership qualities by circling a number from 1 to 10 (1 is low; 10 is high.)

1. **Vision:** a sense of what could and should be done

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. **Ability:** job knowledge and expertise to achieve results

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. **Enthusiasm:** personal commitment that invigorates and motivates people

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. **Stability:** emotional adjustment and objectivity

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. **Concern for others:** service to followers and interest in their welfare

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. **Self-confidence:** inner strength that comes from preparation and competence

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. **Persistence:** determination to see tough tasks through to completion

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. **Vitality:** strength and stamina

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. **Charisma:** magnetic ability to attract people and cause them to follow

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. **Integrity:** honesty, strength of character, and courage that generates trust

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Scoring and Interpretation:

Add all the circled numbers to find the overall score: _____

Score	Evaluation
100–90	Excellent; exceptional
89–80	High; very good
79–70	Average; needs improvement
69–60	Low; much work needed
59 and below	Deficient; poor