



A. C. Macris Consultants

UPDATE

Summer 99

Highlights

TWENTY LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Our last issue, "Colin Powell on Leadership," provided a philosophical perspective on leadership from one of the world's most recognized leaders. This issue provides twenty characteristics of effective leaders. We felt this is a great follow-up to the Colin Powell article since it describes specifics of what a corporate leader should aspire to. For each of the characteristics, a brief discussion of what the characteristic means, and in some cases what it does not mean. In addition, we provide suggested guidelines that bridge the gap between a purely academic discussion to actions that a manager can put into practice. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as the last one. Thank you for your feedback and comments.

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TWENTY LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

A condensed version of Richard K. Lester's Leadership Characteristics. I wish to acknowledge Gerard Urbas, CMSgt 52CS/SCM, US Air Force for sending them to me. I thank Sgt. Urbas for his contribution.

1. Sense of Responsibility

People who aspire to high leadership positions must subordinate their personal desires to the goals of the organization. The true leader recognizes responsibility, seeks it, and relishes it as a vehicle to improve the organization and to "do the right thing."

2. Technical and Professional Competence

The name of the game here is earning respect. Subordinates will give a supervisor or leader a reasonable amount of time to get his or her feet on the ground. But at some point, the leader is going to have to show he or she understands the task and mission of the organization. That doesn't mean you have to be a hands-on expert in every specialty or qualification your people hold. It does mean, however, that you have to demonstrate to your followers that you're interested and care enough to learn what they have to do to accomplish the mission. And then you have to prove yourself competent in your own responsibilities. Remember: subordinates follow leaders who know what they're doing.

3. Emotional Stability

Leaders must exercise self-control if they expect to guide and lead others. They must maintain control even in the most trying situations. Even in the face of "Righteous Indignation," leaders and supervisors should strive to govern their personal lives and not allow personal problems to color or adversely affect their decisions. And remember: there is no separation of "personal" and "professional" lives. You've got to be rock solid and steady at all times,

4. Enthusiasm

A leader must to be sincerely enthusiastic about everything the unit does. You've got to believe in all aspects of the organization's mission--and you've got to show it. Followers will naturally give more of themselves and take more pride in their duty when they know their leaders are just as involved and dedicated as they are. So heed the words of the late, great Vince Lombardi, who said, "If you're not fired with enthusiasm, you'll be fired with enthusiasm!" Words to live by.

5. Listening

A good leader listens--which is much more important than merely hearing. Good listening allows the leader to interpret and evaluate the readiness, morale, and spirit of his or her followers. It enables you to determine what your folks really need to accomplish the mission. It helps you find the path to developing your followers into true professionals. Effective listening builds a special bond with your followers. It shows them they're valuable to you and you appreciate their contributions. So listen up!

6. Self-image

A leader must have a positive self-image, built on objective perception and interpretation of his or her strengths and weaknesses. This is important because your self-image is a controlling factor in behavior and conduct. That is, people act, as they perceive themselves to be. So be honest about those strengths and weaknesses. Use the strengths to advantage and work to improve the weaknesses. Followers will respond to the resulting positive self-image you project. It's called "Presence."

7. Ethics

Ethics are perhaps the key trait in the leadership arena. Professional ethics requires leaders to maintain the highest personal standards of conduct and performance. Ethics require the leader to adhere to those standards in all situations, consistently. Integrity is one of the most important elements of personal ethics, regardless of rank or position. As we well know, integrity is the glue that holds the leadership model together.

8. Recognition

Take time to recognize your people's accomplishments - both as individual members and as a group. The ability to satisfy followers' needs for informal recognition is one of the most common failings of people in authority. All leaders should take stock of the advice provided by philosopher William James when he said, "The deepest principle in human nature is to be appreciated." Wise words.

9. Flexibility

A leader must grasp the principle that no two situations

are exactly the same. What worked yesterday may not work today. Be able and willing to adapt your approach to the particular person, group, or situation at hand. Don't fall prey to the old admonition of "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."

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holds a workforce or
organization together.

10. Humor

Leaders should have a sense of humor and use it to help set the tone within their organization. When the leader smiles, it's easier for everyone to smile. It's a welcome, positive trait. Most people, if not all, prefer to

belong to a pleasant organization rather than one laden with tension. We have enough of that thrust on us from outside. Let's learn to relax and enjoy our comrades' company while we're working hard, putting in those 60-hour plus weeks! Again, leaders need to set the tone in this arena as in all others.

11. Risk

Leaders have to be disposed to seek out and take advantage of opportunities, especially where the reward appears high. Sticking your neck out and taking risks is an inherent part of leadership. Without taking risks, always waiting for the sure solution, you reduce yourself to nothing more than a manager (no slam to managers. they play an important role and function; it's just that there is a marked difference in "leadership" and management" roles). Leadership is a risk endeavor, a win or lose game. The key element in risk taking is good, sound judgment. Taking risks doesn't imply being rash. You won't always win when you take risks, but as long as you risk for the right reason, that's okay. You simply back up and try again.

12. Communication Skill

Effective communications skills, written and spoken, is a key leadership element. A leader may have the best ideas, intentions, plans, or goals, but if he or she cannot turn them into clear, concise directions for the followers, it's all for naught. Good communication is the adhesive that holds a workforce or organization together. Any leader who's not keeping his or her people informed is losing out on one of the most effective motivational tools available. It doesn't have to be fancy or glorious; just down to earth, straight from the gut word on what's going on. It instills a positive attitude toward the leader. It instills trust.

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13. Vision

Leaders need a visual image of where they see the organization going. That visual image equates to the “Big Picture” that’s critical for all to see. You have to know where you fit in, and what your role is to be truly motivated to accomplish the mission. Knowing that “Big Picture” and passing it on to your troops is a key ingredient in creating enthusiasm for who they are and what they do.

14. Courage

Everyone understands physical courage. Moral courage, on the other hand, is not so easily grasped. But it’s far more important in effective leadership. Boil it down to a few short bullets: don’t pass the buck; accept responsibility; be willing to take the heat. As Mark Twain once said, “Courage is the mastery of fear, not the absence of it.” Master it, and your followers and comrades will give you rock solid respect something we all need to be effective.

15. Energy

Mental, physical, and spiritual energy are essential to successful leadership. Good leaders always seem ready to go and require only normal periods of rest. They also discover early that it’s critical to learn how to pace themselves well through any given period’s activities.

16. Perseverance

Those who have achieved or aspire to leadership positions are those who persevere in their duties. Persistence in any undertaking, despite negative influences, opposition, discouragement, and obstacles, is central to an effective leader’s personality. Never say die; don’t quit, never give up the ship. If you give up, so will your followers. If you lose heart, so will your followers. But, if you continue the fight, so will your followers.

Recommended Reading

The following book is worth including in your professional library: *The Productive Edge: How U.S. Industries Are Pointing the Way to a New Era of Economic Growth*, by Richard K. Lester, published by W.W. Norton & Co., ISBN # 0393045749.

...don’t indulge yourself, except in taking on more responsibilities and discharging them. Leaders should never use their position for personal gain or improvement.

17. Indulgence

This one is more of a warning, an admonition: don’t indulge yourself, except in taking on more responsibilities and discharging them. Leaders should never use their position for personal gain or improvement. Their sole purpose should be to accomplish the mission and take care of their people. Any tendency toward indulgence should be governed by a stronger desire to serve your unit, country, and followers. Indulge them.

18. Decision-making

This one is self-evident. Leaders are in business to make decisions and provide direction

and guidance. A leader must be able to use sound judgment to make sound decisions. That sound judgment must be based on correct estimates and assessments of any given situation. It harks back to taking risks. Don’t be rash, but when you have the facts and data, be decisive.

19. Know Your People

What else are you in the position for? Who are you leading? Obviously, you’re not going to lead very well if you don’t know and understand your people. This element has a crucial flip side to it: if you know your people, they will also know you. They’ll know you care and are concerned with their welfare. Once your followers know that, they’re more likely to become the coherent, effective unit you need them to be. Everyone wins.

20. Set the Example

Organizational standards and expectations are set by leadership example. And we all know we are always an example. There are only two choices: a good, positive example, or a negative, discouraging example. Pay special attention to which you are setting, in all circumstances. If your example consistently says, “Follow me. Do as I do,” you’ll be successful as a leader. If your example cries out, “Don’t do as I do, do as I say,” you’ve failed and ceased to be an effective leader. You may still be in a position of authority, and you may still have subordinates, but you have no followers. They’re out looking for someone else to lead them.

Eight Steps to Manage Change Successfully

1. Establish a Sense of Urgency

Make sure organization knows what is at stake and what opportunities will be lost if change does not occur.

2. Create a Guiding Condition

A team of leaders, not only one or two individuals: choose members strategically (leaders who are credible in organization); take time to ensure trust and common goals and to define roles in change effort.

3. Develop a Vision & Strategy

A product of guiding coalition, must be neither too narrow nor too vague, and must clarify the goals, motivate action and remain the theme that coordinate all efforts.

4. Communicate the Change Vision

Strategy here is as important as content; must be multi-level, repeated consistently and persistently; leaders must “walk the talk,” allow for employee feedback and listen carefully for implied resistance (conscious and unconscious).

5. Empower Broad-based Action

Ensure that organizational structure facilitates the change strategy; that people have the skills, coaching and support they need; that rewards (and

other) programs motivate desired behaviors/results; and that middle managers and supervisors do not inhibit positive movement toward optimal employee involvement.

6. Generate Short-term Wins

Provide proof that efforts are producing results and stress is worth it; set specific interim targets that are measurable, visible and important; manage effectively so as to meet each interim target; utilize every opportunity to express praise and gratitude to employees for their efforts.

7. Consolidate Gains and Utilize Momentum to Further the Change Effort

Celebrate interim wins but maintain urgency toward long-term vision; ensure buy-in to each change and look continuously for internal barriers/resistance that may arise as change chips away at old culture and its adherents (be empathic).

8. Ingrain New Practices into the (New) Culture

Ensure that norms of behavior, shared values and organizational programs/structures incorporate the changes so progress is institutionalized; emphasize the improved business (and other) results that the changes have produced; hires/appointments should be supporters of the new culture.



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