



Focus

A publication of Wagner Consulting Group

October 2008

Home

Mission

Services

Testimonials

Clients

About

Nine Essential Leadership Traits

I recently developed a leadership session for a group of construction project managers. The end result used ideas and language from many different leadership experts, to whom I am indebted, so I make no claims of originality. I do claim credit for my selection of the nine traits and the order in which they are presented, which reflects my judgment as to relative importance.

The following list has two obvious uses. The first is as a training tool for a leader. Second, these traits can serve as an evaluation tool for a person being considered for promotion or hire into a leadership position. When several candidates are being considered, a side-by-side comparison of leadership traits helps clarify the best choice.

Leaders value teamwork. They relentlessly upgrade their team, using every encounter as an opportunity to evaluate, coach, and build self-confidence. Authentic team-oriented leaders *naturally* seek to grow their people's abilities, and their followers feel this on an emotional level. The result is better performance, increased loyalty, and a greater willingness to make personal sacrifices for the good of the organization.

Author Robert Thompson says, "A leader Knows the way, Goes the way, and Shows the way." A leader's hips are connected to his lips – he walks the talk. The leader makes sure people see the vision *and* helps them get there. This concept involves visioning, pathfinding, and leading by example.

Leaders radiate positive energy and optimism. If a person is not naturally optimistic, they cannot inspire confidence in followers. Without followers, there is – by definition – no leadership.

Leaders establish trust with candor, transparency, and credit. Lack of trust is a big problem in American business. In U.S. companies, less than half of employees trust their senior leaders, according to the May 2008 issue of *Chief Learning Officer* magazine. Leadership expert Warren Bennis says, "Leadership without mutual trust is a contradiction in terms."

When a leader is candid, and freely gives credit to those to whom it's due, followers do not worry about a hidden agenda. Instead, they use their emotional energy to achieve common goals.

The best leaders are servants to their followers. Their first responsibility is to define reality, and their last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader becomes a servant and a debtor, because no leader accomplishes much without his or her followers. So says Max Depree, a member of Fortune magazine's National Business Hall of Fame.

Leaders have the courage to make unpopular decisions and gut calls. Let be clear: you cannot be a coward and a leader. Moreover, a leader must often make decisions with only partial information, and that's why good leaders know when to trust their instincts.

Leaders are lifelong learners. They look for new ideas, inside and outside their organization. Curiosity is a trait high on my list when evaluating potential leaders because innovation is becoming more important with each passing year.

Leaders inspire risk taking and learning by setting the example. Years ago, management guru Tom Peters famously said, "Fail fast forward." Leaders know when to take risks, are quick to identify failure and end what doesn't work, and always seek out lessons learned so the organization moves forward. They encourage appropriate initiative by their followers, and don't overreact when a subordinate's choice turns out badly.

Leaders celebrate. They celebrate wins, big and small, and their people – for who they are *and* what they have accomplished. Commemorations can range from a planned event to an impromptu get together, but the consistent theme of good leaders is a joyful celebration of the human spirit.

Tom Wagner

We help our clients accelerate profitable growth with
Executive coaching, Strategic planning, & Employee development

www.wagnercg.com

Call us at 800 422-1374 to learn more

If you do not want to receive this newsletter, reply to this e-mail with REMOVE in the Subject field.

