

Timely Tips

for Workshop Participants

from Thinking Well Consulting

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This week: Five Top Traits of Best Leaders

Dear Reader,

Five Top Traits

An effective leader is an effective manager of people. Great leaders demonstrate many traits, or "leadership qualities." Among the top traits are vision, passion, good decision-making skills, team building skills and to be a person of character - this is often interpreted as having integrity, courage or being authentic.



In the book, "Lessons From the Top: The Search for America's Best Business Leaders," Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks makes the following observation:

"I think it's very difficult to lead today when people are not really truly participating in the decision. You won't be able to attract and retain great people if they don't feel like they are part of the authorship of the strategy and the authorship of the really critical issues. If you don't give people an opportunity to really be engaged, they won't stay."

How to Demonstrate the Top Traits:

1. Being a visionary

- This is your vision of the company. Whatever methods you can use to create a picture, do it. Paint a picture with words. Speak it, write it, draw it. As they say, "A picture is worth a thousand words."
- As you work, your company's vision should be in your mind every day, and occasionally reevaluate it so that it stays current with the changing times in which we live.
- Your staff needs to be just as involved as you in keeping it up to date if you truly want them to buy in on the vision. Be sure to keep your key players involved.

2. Being passionate

- Your employees want passion; in fact, they'll go to the ends of earth because of it, live and die for it. Think of the sailors who traveled with Christopher Columbus or Leif Ericsson to explore uncharted territory. Their leaders' passion inspired them to take on new and very dangerous challenges.
- To build an extraordinary management team, you've got to light the "fire in their bellies," to get them to feel passion about the company and connect to the leader's vision.
- Passion is such a key part of being a great leader that if you don't have it, you simply can't be a great leader.
- Passion is infectious: When you talk about your vision for the company, let your passion for your vision shine through. Others will feel it and want to get on board with you. Your passion, to be effective needs to be connected to your vision. If not, recreate your vision.

3. Being a great decision-maker

- Do you talk to your management team and create a list of pros and cons to help you make the best decision? Maybe you conduct a cost analysis. Whatever your style, here's a system to become a better decision-maker.

Q = Quick. Be quick but not hasty.

C = Committed. Be committed to your decision but not rigid.

A = Analytical. Be analytical, but don't over-analyze (Too much analysis can cause paralysis.)

T = Thoughtful. Be thoughtful about all concerned, but don't be obsessive.

When you use this method, it'll help you to decide when to bring others into the process and what steps need to be taken to help you make better decisions.

4. Being a team builder

- To become a great leader, you must develop a great team or, one might say, a well-oiled machine. But how do you do that? You can start by handing off responsibility to your team and letting your team to run with it.
- Don't breathe down their necks and don't micromanage, but make yourself available if questions or problems come up.
- When projects aren't on track or your team is falling behind on deadline, it serves no one if you start pointing fingers. This is when you need to rise to the occasion and inspire confidence in your employees, to let them know you support them and ready to help.
- Be ready to alter plans and make new ones. Don't forget to use humor to

keep your team's spirits up during a crisis. When an emergency hits, your team will look to you to be a tower of strength and endurance.

5. Having strength of character

All the other traits really hinge on this one innate trait - your character strengths and limitations. Your self-awareness of your character will indicate to what level it will play a critical role in your leadership style. Great leaders are always learning and growing and take steps to understand their individual personality, behavior patterns and core values. Character strengths correspond to the types of relationships a leader establishes with his/her people. Does he/she elicit trust? Does he/she model the behavior he/she wishes to see demonstrated by employees?

Strength of character is about showing up as one's authentic self; willing to show strengths and limitations, giving advice and support and asking for it when indicated.

"Live with integrity. Lead by example."

The five traits are discussed in the book, "Lessons From the Top: The Search for America's Best Business Leaders," by Neff, Citrin and Brown. This week's Timely Tips reflect the Five Traits as described by Patty Vogan in her article: Five Key Traits of Great Leadership.

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