



What makes a great leader?

There are 12 great traits that I believe are necessary for great leadership. I chose them not just because of their intrinsic value but also because of their interaction and relationship to the other traits. Some of the traits enable others, some are enabled by others and yet again some traits act as a (moral) constraint. They are to be seen holistically and there is no ranking implied in the order given.



1. VISION THINKING

"Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others."
Jonathan Swift

Great leaders turn trees into forests. They are able to see the potential of small acorns and create a vision of tomorrow composed of forests. They understand the detail, the challenges and barriers but do not let it constrain their thinking.

Vision isn't born in a bubble or in a sterile environment but through **listening** to customers, prospects, staff and markets. You don't get your vision from being in a helicopter but from being on the ground. Leaders take that vision and with their **values** turn it into a mission. All their subsequent actions and decisions are guided by that mission. In a very true sense they are led by the vision they have created and are themselves subservient to that mission. They will sacrifice self-interest but not their **values** in the cause of that mission.

2. AUTHENTIC

"Authenticity is the alignment of head, mouth, heart, and feet - thinking, saying, feeling, and doing the same thing - consistently. This builds trust, and followers love leaders they can trust."
Lance Secretan

Great Leaders are authentic. They do not pretend to be someone else or put on a persona. Some leaders have charisma, some don't. Great leaders don't try and be someone there are not, but try and perfect what they are. They are the genuine article.



3. LEARNER

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

John F. Kennedy

You can't lead without learning. A great leader is a teacher and coach, but if you are not learning, you're not growing. You cannot teach if you do not value learning and if you are not learning you are setting a bad example to those you aspire to teach. You need to be humble to learn and humble to lead. Leaders that constantly learn are often first to identify and mitigate challenges ahead.

4. LISTENER

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."

Stephen R. Covey

Great leaders are not just good listeners, they are proactive listeners. They pro-actively seek out opportunities to listen to staff, customers and prospects to learn. They recognize that every opportunity to listen is an opportunity to learn.



5. HUMILITY

“True humility is intelligent self respect which keeps us from thinking too highly or too meanly of ourselves. It makes us modest by reminding us how far we have come short of what we can be.”

Ralph W. Sockman

Great leaders are humble, they don't believe they have all the answers or are always right. This humility helps them to listen and learn. By recognising and admitting their limitations they encourage openness and teamwork. They become approachable and open to other points of view. An “Open Door” policy is of no use if the person inside does not have an “Open Mind”.

6. INTEGRITY

“The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office. “

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Great Leaders have a strong sense of personal integrity that they will not sacrifice for personal or business gain. They do not believe the ends justify the means. It requires courage but in doing so creates trust, respect and loyalty.



7. TRUST

"The glue that holds all relationships together -- including the relationship between the leader and the led is trust, and trust is based on integrity."

Brian Tracy

Leadership requires trust from those that follow. The most effective way of gaining trust and inspiring your staff is to trust them. Trust given is Trust returned. If you do not trust your staff you will not be trusted in return. Great leaders hire people they trust and trust people they hire. Being trusted is both empowering and humbling.

8. EMPOWERMENT

"An empowered organization is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire, and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organizational success."

Stephen Covey

Great leaders turn the organisational pyramid upside down and focus on serving and empowering their managers and staff to enable them to execute effectively. Empowerment requires both trust in your staff and core values that you engender through leadership. Great Leaders empower staff because they know that is the most effective way to achieve the mission.

9. EMPATHY

“Change begins with understanding and understanding begins by identifying oneself with another person: in a word, empathy.”

Richard Eyre

Being able to step inside another’s shoes and understand their point of view is critical to understanding customers, staff and stakeholders. Listening without understanding or relating is not meaningful dialogue. Great leaders utilise their empathy and integrity to ensure messages are correctly communicate and not misunderstood.

10. PASSION

“Nothing great in the world was accomplished without passion.”

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Great leaders are passionate about what they do and why they do it. This passion is inspired by their vision and driven by their mission. Very few people are passionate about their salary no matter how much it is. Unlocking people’s passion is a key leadership trait achieved through empathy and listening and energized through empowering.



11. EXECUTE

“Nothing speaks like results. If you want to build the kind of credibility that connects with people, then deliver results before you deliver a message. Get out and do what you advise others to do. Communicate from experience.”

John C. Maxwell

Great leaders are not cheerleaders. They execute and lead from the front. They set the pace and set the example for others to follow. They do not remain at “arm’s length” for fear of failure but alongside their colleagues to ensure success. Great leaders are always accountable. In the words of Einstein *“Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others, it is the only means.”*

12. COURAGE

“Wherever you see a successful business, someone once made a courageous decision.”

Peter Drucker

It takes courage to take risks, to change direction and sometimes go against consensus or the prevailing culture. It takes courage to lead with integrity. Without courage you end up following not leading. Great leaders will have as many critics as fans. If you always look for consensus you will often end up with mediocrity.