

EIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP

by Ann Lehman

I first wrote about leadership 15 years ago. As time and leaders change, I find it useful to update my thinking about this.

What is leadership? Leadership is an influence process: The ability to motivate others to do something, believe something or act a certain way. Leadership style is the pattern of behaviors you use when you are trying to influence the performance of others. It's about doing "the right thing," through honest conviction and an authentic vision of the future.

Many people in the nonprofit/public interest sector have been thrust into leadership positions without appropriate training or experience. Some come by these traits naturally, but the good news is that everyone can learn. Books, articles, coaches, and models of effective leadership skills trainings are easily accessed on and offline.

Here are eight characteristics Zimmerman Lehman looks for in a leader.

1) **VISION** - being able to articulate the future in clear simple language: An emphasis on what will be rather than what is. A leader should be able to state concretely what success will look like and how you will get there. Leadership is seeing the wider context and underlining structure of an organization and inspiring others with a vision of what is possible. This is a quality almost all management gurus agree is necessary for a good leader. Leaders come from very diverse backgrounds. Computer scientist Anita Borg "had a unique capacity to mix technical expertise and fearless vision that inspired, motivated and moved women to embrace technology instead of fearing or ignoring it," as the [Institute](#) she created put it. Her vision was to have 50% representation for women in computing by 2020, it may not happen but her work helped inspire Google, Facebook, Twitter and other technology companies to release their diversity data for the first time this year.

2) You must be **TRUSTWORTHY**. Trust is built on honesty. Actions do speak much louder than words. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor - if you have not yet read her [autobiography](#), put it on your list, it is an excruciatingly honest description of her family's struggles, her diabetes and her ambition to be a judge. While she had to deny she would be guided by her personal and subjective experience in the world in order to assure her critics during her Supreme Court nomination hearings that she could follow the law, her book leaves little doubt that these formative experiences have contributed to her beliefs and a value system that will frame her judicial judgments. It also shows that she went out of her way to understand opposing views and regularly worked to build bridges instead of walls. All of this builds trust, and confidence that a leader has integrity, reliability and truthfulness.

3) You must understand what **MOTIVATES** people, and it will be different for each person. While those of us in the nonprofit world can't lure talent and outstanding effort with high salaries, there are other motivators. Simple but too often ignored motivators include: praise (tell folks they've done a job well), appreciation (a simple "thank you" when appropriate will earn you respect), and recognition (credit for input on a report, awards or a letter of commendation for exceptional service). Learning to give positive feedback is crucial! Teambuilding exercises are a great way to build enthusiasm and cooperation. Sometimes, however, we need to motivate by being clear about the consequences of underperformance or inappropriate behavior.

Michele Obama has motivated many young people with statements such as, "You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once, but don't ever underestimate the importance you can have because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own."

4) One popular buzz phrase in the leadership discussion is **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)**. Being able to read people (know what they want or need) is invaluable. "EI" includes identifying, using, understanding and managing emotions. I like how leadership guru Stephen Covey describes the five primary components of emotional intelligence:

1. **Self-Awareness** — The ability to reflect on one's own life, grow in self-knowledge, and use that knowledge to improve oneself and either consume or compensate for weaknesses.
2. **Personal Motivation** — What really excites people — the vision, values, goals, hopes, desires, and passion that make up their priorities
3. **Self-Regulation** — The ability to manage oneself toward achieving one's vision and values.
4. **Empathy** — The ability to see how other people see and feel about things.
5. **Social Skills** — How people resolve differences, solve problems, produce creative solutions, and interact optimally to further their joint purposes.

Research suggests EI is responsible for as much as 80% of the "success" in our lives. It used to be called empathy or intuition; now if you google EI you get over ten million hits (interesting that last time I wrote this it was only a million). If you are not born with this intuition, you can learn it. Reviewing some of these google hits is a start!

5) You must be able to **EMPOWER** others. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. [Eric Holder, US Attorney General](#), insisted the Justice Department empower the powerless, by fighting for voting rights in Florida, Texas and Wisconsin, and standing with the people in Ferguson Missouri when they were feeling under assault.

In the workplace, empowerment is based on the idea that giving employees skills, resources, authority and opportunity will contribute to their competence and fulfillment. Teach employees how to accomplish a task rather than do it for them (even if you can do it faster or better, it will save you time in the long run). I don't like his sexist language, but Theodore Roosevelt hit on a truth when he said "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men [women] to do what he [she] wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it." Tell people what you expect from them, give them the tools they need to succeed, and then get out of their way. Learn to listen; nothing is more empowering than being heard.

6) Leaders must be willing to take **RISKS**. This sounds like a cliché but if you do things the way they've always been done, you will always get the same result. Read [Steve Jobs biography](#) - you may not like the man, but you will respect his ability to take huge chances against all odds, with great payoffs that have created legions of devoted Mac fans. Leaders should also reward risk-taking in others.

7) A leader should be able to be able to **FOCUS AND FOLLOW THROUGH**. This involves setting priorities and doing what you say you will. Thomas Edison said, "Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." Jerry Brown follows the Latin admonition "age quod agis" which translates as "focus on what you are doing." It is critically important to know what to do, but the genius comes for making it happen through hard work. Doing what you say you will (ideally when you said you will) is a critical and a much underrated leadership trait.

8) And last but certainly not least - it helps to have a sense of **HUMOR**. The ability to laugh at oneself demonstrates a degree of self-knowledge, and is the easiest way to bring others along with you. Humor is also a great tension breaker, but very inappropriate if used to belittle someone. I think the overwhelming outpouring of grief we all felt recently when we lost Robin Williams speaks to his amazing ability to use humor, be it acting, telling a story or making a point. He particularly excelled at self-deprecation. [Margaret Cho's](#), who can be controversial, use of humor, has done much to challenge stereotypes of Asians and hers is recognized as one of America's most penetrating and relevant voices. Find all these traits in one person and you are bound to see a leader.

If you have some of these traits but not all—well, that is what training is all about. Which do you have? Which do you need to develop more of?

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8 Characteristics of Great Leadership – In spite of the ambiguous research

October 29, 2012 2:29 pm by **Richard Banfield**

Over the last several decades lots of research has been done on the subject of successful business leadership. It might be surprising but there is very little agreement on the subject. The short version is that there are very few, if any, commonalities to business success but the long version is that in spite of the research there are in fact some common characteristics of successful leaders. It seems that in all walks of life, great leadership characteristics also show up in the most successful business leaders.

1. Great leaders set a clear direction

When I think about great leaders the one thing that always strikes me is the clarity of their vision. The vision and the skill with which they communicate that vision makes it immediately obvious who to follow. It

doesn't need to be a 'writ in stone' declaration, but they might have a simple strategy, an exciting plan, a clear vision or simply demonstrate their path by example. Most importantly they make it clear enough that anyone can understand where they are headed. They know where they are going and so do the people that are following them.

2. They are great motivators

We all need a little nudge from time to time. Great leaders know when to provide that needed encouragement. Not just inspiring motivation but urging and, if necessary, forcing. The best leaders have taken the time to know how each member of their team is motivated. Combining that knowledge with the team cultural dynamics makes for a powerful motivational recipe.

3. They get things done

Having a penchant for action is by far the most important part of business success. In order for things to get done a great leader needs to be able to make decisions. Being a decisive person is a core leadership responsibility. Getting things done also means knowing what *not* to do. Starting and stopping projects is the responsibility of all leaders.

4. They get the right things done

Following on from above; it's not just getting things done, but getting the right things done. There's no use in

being really productive if all the work you do doesn't achieve the company's goals. Richard Branson has a famous productivity tool - a to-do list. His to-do list prioritizes the three most important things that need to be done on that day. He maximizes his time to get those three things done and then turns his attention to the rest. Each day starts with a new set of priorities. If something consistently doesn't make it onto the top three list it gets removed from the list altogether.

5. They sustain momentum

Business opportunities and threats are like the ocean, both tend to come in waves. Reading the waves and knowing how to sustain momentum through good times and bad is critical to long-term success. They are persistent and might even be described as stubborn. Teams watch their leaders for cues on how to react to problems. The flip side to this is that most business leaders, especially young startup leaders, think that business success is an all-out-sprint. By the time they find out it's a long marathon with lots of ups and downs they've blown through their resources and are out of momentum.

6. They lead by example

Great leaders do the things they talk about; walk the talk. Especially in bad times the best leaders don't just ask others to make sacrifices they are the first to put their

shoulder to the grindstone. Strength under fire is what people notice and remember.

7. They don't complain and they don't blame others

Taking responsibility for all aspects of the business means never hiding behind other's failures. Great leaders own the outcome of every decision they make and stand by their team when things don't turn out as planned. Looking for reasons to blame others is the shortest way to failure. Leaders that blame others quickly lose respect and the support of their team.

8. Be nice while working hard

Being a kind person isn't a requirement but it also tends to help in the long term – a lot! Working hard while remaining a kind and thoughtful person can be really tough. The complexity of running a business can often lead to anxiety and stress. Successful leaders don't take it out on others. They remain calm and considerate.

The stereotype of the screaming boss is something best left for daytime television. In the real world kindness and hard work set the best example for great leadership.

Final word; if anyone figures out how to achieve these things without having to spend years learning the hard way please let me know 😊

Self-actualized small-business owners know they can accomplish just about anything.

Wondering just how self-aware you are? There's a good chance you're there if you possess many of the following eight attributes:

1. Accepting

Self-actualized leaders accept themselves, as well as their employees, colleagues, vendors and customers, as they are rather than hoping for something different. This approach allows them to have realistic expectations, which facilitates a positive, productive work environment and helps prevent resentment and disappointment.

2. Humble

Leaders who are self-actualized don't announce it. "It's easy to spot self-actualized leaders," Salzman says. "They're the ones who don't act like they're great leaders, but employees and others in their orbit look up to them as though they are. In other words, self-actualized leaders will never tell you that they're leaders, but everyone knows they are."

3. Willing to Seek Assistance

Self-aware leaders have no problem reaching out to their customers and clients or membership bases and asking questions that reveal their lack of knowledge or skills in certain areas. “The interesting thing is that by sharing with the business world that they’re aware of their need for help, they receive more empathy and support,” Salzman says.

4. Able to Solve Problems

“Self-actualized small-business owners know they can accomplish just about anything,” says Gregg Weisstein, co-founder and COO of [BloomNation](#), a company that works with local artisan florists to hand deliver flowers in more than 3,000 cities nationwide. “Self-aware leaders know they can be and do anything, and they realize that no problem is too big as long as they’re willing to put in the hard work to solve it.”

5. Realistic

Self-actualized leaders are fully aware of their personal faults and the weaknesses of their businesses. "Because of this, they can address those faults far faster than leaders who choose to overlook the tough stuff," Salzman says. “They have no problem revealing issues about their businesses, and this attitude results in creating better businesses.”

6. Spontaneous

When an interesting idea or suggestion is made, self-actualized leaders aren't afraid to put tradition and schedules aside to try something new. They know that some of the world's most groundbreaking discoveries came out of trying something unique and even unheard of.

7. Independent

While self-aware leaders work well with others and aren't afraid to ask for assistance, they're also more likely to be autonomous. This means they'll gather the opinions and ideas of their employees and associates, then retreat in order to process and synthesize the information into a useable and workable format.

8. Grateful

Self-actualized leaders view the world with a perpetual sense of wonder and appreciation. They enjoy simple experiences and are thankful for employees and others who help them run their businesses. And they freely share their appreciation with acknowledgements, thank-yous and rewards for jobs well done.

If you think you still need to work on developing some of the attributes mentioned above before you can say you're a self-actualized leader, Salzman has some tips.

"Becoming self-actualized is similar to a recovery program [for addiction]," she says. "First, you have to admit you're in need of improving yourself as a leader and your business

overall. Then, and only then, can you believe that the power to become a better leader lies in understanding that the issue is not you but that it lies within your business sphere.

“Once you delegate to the appropriate people,” Salzman adds, “you can improve your awareness of which things need work and let that evolve over time into a deep understanding of the kind of businessperson you are.”

If you're hoping to become a more effective leader, examine your leadership style and see if there's some room for self-actualization.

Eight Traits of Great Leaders and One Lesson from a Monkey

SHARI ROBERTS

A recent company leadership offsite in Bangalore, India provided fresh reminders of the leadership behaviors needed to build a strong leadership legacy. I view the leadership traits shared by management consultant [Mohit Chhabra](#) as critical components of leading change in digital communications and navigating the uncharted waters of social business.

Great leaders:

1. Are continual learners – Great leaders bring wisdom and experience to situations, but equally as important they are always adding to their knowledge, practicing new skills & sharing this information with others. They strive to be a complete leader across the many facets of leadership.

2. Inspire a shared vision – The best leaders know where they are headed and bring people along the journey with them. They envision the future, entrust others and enlist people to achieve a shared vision.

3. Are good listeners – Strong leaders actively listen to their stakeholders. They solicit input and engage with a variety of individuals. They adapt their communication style to engage with those who are different from them.

4. Challenge processes – Great leaders experiment. They search for new opportunities and innovative ideas. They assert themselves in chaotic situations and will take risks.

5. Make time for introspection – The best leaders know the value of disconnecting. This means stepping away from the day-to-day to regularly create the head space for new ideas, fresh thinking and that “Ah ha!” moment to happen.

6. Enable Others – Strong leaders treat others with respect and courtesy. They empower others with the confidence that he or she will be there for them and will be their advocate. They foster collaboration and mentorship to strengthen the skills of the entire team.

7. Build camaraderie – Good leaders recognize individual contributions and build an environment of mutual trust and friendship among people who spend a lot of time together. They celebrate the victories and build a sense of connection to the organization.

8. Model a good example – The best leaders project the same values and behaviors they expect of others. They are clear on their personal values and are not afraid to change their mind.

What behaviors do you respect in the world's best leaders?

And the lesson from the monkey? When in Bangalore, never leave the outdoor tea table unattended or your sugar packets just may disappear.

About the Author: