

What are the qualities  
of an effective  
leader?



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Mankind never had a society that did not have a leader or a leading group. Leaders were given power to decide the fate of their countries or organizations. Throughout history, scholars and historians praised great leaders, and harshly castigated incompetent ones. Great leaders brought their nation to prosperity and order, whereas incompetent leaders led the nation to ruins and made their people suffer and die. All leaders, eventually, reached a resolve; " I shall make my country prosperous." There were many great thinkers who pointed out what the qualities of a good leader who can bring prosperity and order in the society, and some of them contradicted each other in the most drastic way. However, qualities of a great/effective leader are charisma that can manipulate people's mind at one's will, mental stability that can control one's own emotions, ability to bring out the best from the seemingly most unhelpful resources, perceptive skill that can detect the truth, and brilliance of both mind and body with necessary cruelty and wickedness. In other words, the most effective leader should be nearly perfect or inhumane at some point.

Manipulation of the human mind is, I believe, the most important quality of an effective leader. The definition of manipulation is the same as control. However, who really wants to be controlled when they have their own free will? That is why, a manipulation of a great leader is control without restriction, but control with free will. As a leader, one must constantly check whether his group of people are under his influence. Of course, most of the time, position gives a person immense influence over the people of the group, like the pope or a military leader. The pope, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, had a great influence over the strong sponsors of

Catholicism until the end of Renaissance Europe. Military leaders, on the other hand, are capable of starting an uprising all by themselves. One general rule that applies in the military is simple: follow without question. This gives them the authority to control people without any difficulties, but we do not call them effective leaders just because their influence can cause substantial damage to the society. The manipulation of an effective leader is not forced, but voluntary. The case of the popes is forced because the sponsors' religion requires them to help the pope when in times of need, and furthermore, if some sponsors do not cooperate, this group of "non-religious" people will be isolated from the community of leaders and lose what influence they had. Therefore, it is not entirely voluntary but mostly forced. An effective leader can make people do what he or she wants them to do without telling them to do so because the interest of the people lie parallel with that of the leader. An effective leader's people do what they feel necessary for them to do, without knowing that the leader wanted them to move in this way, just like how Lao tzu described a good leader. A clear example is Emperor Taizong of Tang Dynasty, Li Shimin. According to the Record of the Great historian, also known as Shiji (史記), by Sima Qian, although Li Shimin gained his throne through an immoral mean, he later made his nation prosperous that even when a valuable property fell on the ground, no one bothered to pick them up thinking that someone might have lost it in unconsciously. Also, when there were catastrophes that flooded a whole city, people, without taking orders from anyone, went out to help in the rebuilding process. This was in fact the very thing that Li Shimin wanted to see happen and his popularity has given him the power to manipulate people without doubting that it will cause them ruin.

Some might ask why manipulation is the key element for an effective leader. Would it not be like playing god? Is it not that the same as controlling people with sweet talking, or luring children with candies? Indeed, it might look like playing god, but power of god is way beyond the abilities of humans. The god in this context is not necessarily god from the bible, but a supernatural being with immense powers to create, control, and destroy mankind. One of his powers can be described as invisible string that treats humans like puppets, whereas manipulations done by a leader is like a contract that enables each other to act, but for a very long period of time. God's power makes men work like his puppet, a doll that can be controlled with his invisible hand, broken, and forgotten. If a person A is considered to be controllable, breakable, and forgettable by another person B, then it means that this person A is not an equal of person B, but person A becomes an inferior of person B. There are no man that can do such thing for they neither have the power to completely control another person's mind nor have the cruelty to treat everyone, including their family, as lesser than themselves. That is the limitation of people compared to the ability of a god. Now, if this is not godly at all, it seems like luring children with sweets. To this statement, I must ask; does it really? Is it a give and take process? If manipulation was indeed a give and take process, that would require one to lose a thing and gain something else. In comparison with the given idea, the leader must give something to the people and earn something, and the people should gain something and lose something. In this manipulative process, no side loses anything because the concept of pain of losing a possession is non-existent in this case. Naturally, a fact that all human can agree on is the following statement, " if one loses his or her possession, he

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or she feels pain for the loss". In logic, when one statement, " If P, then Q" is true, then its inversion, " If not P then not Q", of its conversion, " If not Q then not P", becomes true, which is also called a contraposition. Considering the previous statement true, logic states that its contraposition, " if one does not feel pain for loss, one did not lose anything", becomes true. Therefore, neither side lost anything to each other. Consider how two lovers give each other gifts and supports. If one side needs something, another will gladly provide it knowing very well that the giver will not benefit a lot. There is no pain of losing a possession in this situation, and furthermore, the giver will not say he has lost anything.

Perceptive skill is a follow up of manipulation of people. Perceptive skill refers to an ability to see the truth and to understand a matter, object, and other people with great competence. People with this skill are likely draw closer to the essence of the problem. A leader needs this because the ability to detect the essence of the problem will most likely give a leader a very good position to start the job. If the problem is unknown, there can be no solution at all. Furthermore, if the problem is misunderstood, it is highly probable that one will never reach most appropriate answer to the problem. The case of Edward ' Blackbeard' Teach can show that perceptive skill is one of the quality of a good leader. He understood that commanding a fleet required a man with more than just brute force. The problem was how to get a strong grip on the interest and faith of his crews and captains. He, despite being a pirate, was intelligible enough to get the attention of his crew by following their opinions. If their opinions seemed fair enough, he considered them. Also, he had an intimidating body build and face; and he did not kill or

inflict harm on his captives, but cultivated a sense of fear in them, making the story to be exaggerated and avoid fighting as much as possible, and plunder without much fighting. Even during his fight, he always attached slow burning fumes to his hair and beard to give his enemies and crews a demonic image. This pirate leader achieved success mostly from his ability to see the problem with the commanding a group of people. His understanding of the working of human mind made him an epitome of pirates during his era.

Another important quality of an effective leader is mental stability in any situation, which means even if someone was brutally murdered in front of him or her, he or she can maintain his clear sense of reality and give rational options for the problem. There is a proverb in Korea which says, “ Even if one is in a tiger’s jaw, get the mind right, one can survive”. This means that despite any circumstance, if one can remain sane, he or she can overcome those circumstances. Therefore, control of emotion is crucial. For instance, if a leader happens to come across an incident where his people have messed with him, he will form some kind of grudge upon those people even though he knows that he should not. The grudge will keep accumulating as time passes, and leader will eventually release it with his granted power. This could be devastating for the country. An example in which a leader failed by no control of emotion is Yeonsangun of Joseon Dynasty. According to the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty , this king had no patience whatsoever, and whenever he was angry, he would kill his subjects without any hesitation. This led to the frustration of the citizens and other officials, both corrupt and righteous. The result was an uprising that had damaged the country for a

long period of time. Uncontrolled emotion leads everyone, including the leader himself, to ruin. Control of emotion, or maintaining the stability of one's mind is crucial.

Another crucial component of being a leader is his ability to make decisions that will bring the best outcome out of any circumstances. Imagine a stock broker who is in charge of distributing his clients' money to buy the stocks to bring them more money to and in turn earn compensation. This requires a lot of researching and decision making above all. With the same given resources, a slight change can make a certain company grow bigger or go bankrupt. It is the job of a stock broker to convince his clients to use him and spend their money to make it grow bigger. The same can be said about a leader. A leader is chosen by the people, given powers by the people, and asked to take responsibility for the improvement of the society. To be a good leader, it is necessary for them to have the capability and competence to make the right decisions. Wuzi, the strategist during the warring state period in China, had a personal belief that if ever one wants a battle won, it is necessary to have the right decision making accordingly. He stated various ways to keep soldiers motivated and answers for some of the situations in the battlefield that can lead to right decision making. It is said that with his strategies, he won almost all battles he had joined in his 50 years of being a military commander. So, it is always important for a leader to make the correct decision to bring out the best result.

Last qualities that a leader needs are brilliance and cruelty. It is quite obvious that a superior man is given more privileges and power because most people would choose a smarter and stronger man to be their leader

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because this stronger man is capable of thinking, or doing things that they cannot do. However, it may be questionable as to why a leader needs to be cruel. It actually is necessary for them to be cruel as well as brilliant because cruelty brings fear, and fear, if used well, can bring order. It is not a cruelty that is embedded with anger or frustration. It is rather a cruelty used as a means to control the people. Control is necessary if the society is to maintain its order. Take Joseph Stalin for example; he was cruel and demanded complete control over the people he was ruling. Although in a repressed nature, he was able to bring some order in Soviet Union.

So, the essay has discussed some of the important qualities of being a leader. It can be said that if a person has one or two of those qualities, that person has some chances of being a good leader. However, a person cannot have all the aspects mentioned in this essay, for that would be too perfect of a human being. It is difficult for a person to have charisma that can manipulate people's mind at one's will. Also, it would be extremely difficult to acquire mental stability that can control emotions in the face of gory and painful death. As far as I am concerned, there are limits in which humans are capable of and a single human can only be so good as to have one or two of the qualities of a good leader. To be successful like the leaders previously discussed, it will not take all but few of the qualities of an efficient leader.