

What makes a good leader? essay sample

[Business](#), [Leadership](#)



There are a myriad of qualities that form effective leadership. It may never be agreed upon whether leadership arises from a set of innate characteristics (“leaders are born”) or, rather, from observable actions (“leaders are made”). Some basic leadership qualities, however, seem almost universal, no matter the leader or type of group they head: Good communication skills, the ability to constructively deal with a variety of personalities, and the mental toughness to shoulder responsibility and weather criticism. Certain personality traits are also required, such as, having a sense of humor, trustworthiness and general good people skills. The traits of a good leader, and the common thread in any leadership model, is that the traits of a leader are the product of one of three broad bases of knowledge: First, knowledge of the group; next, knowledge of the goals of the group; and finally, and perhaps the most important, the leader’s knowledge of his or her self.

“Leaders must have knowledge of the group’s members (Happy Atom, 2003). There’s no way a leader can get a team to work together without first learning how to work with each person as an individual. Leadership is a one-on-one sport”. In any group, all of the members have different personality traits, job skills, and opinions that they bring to the table. While it is the responsibility of each team member to contribute to the common goals of the team, it is the leader’s task to assess the strengths, and weaknesses of each member to see how they would best contribute to the goals at hand. An effective group leader will take time to learn about each individual, in an effort to maximize each member’s contribution to the group. Being an active contributor to the group’s goals allows each member to experience a

genuine sense of accomplishment when they are able to use their talents, as well as respect toward their leader for respecting them and recognizing their abilities. This element of respect is important, even more so than group members liking their leader: It isn't important that people like you. It's important that they respect you. They may like you but not follow you. If they respect you, they'll follow you, even if perhaps they don't like you." (Smith 1996)

Closely related to the idea of knowing one's team well, is to know the goals of the team. All groups have common goals they set out to achieve; this is the purpose of a collective effort rather than a solitary one. The effective leader must have a clear sense of these goals and what is expected of the team. If the goals are not clear, the team leader is responsible for clarifying the goals in order to give the rest of the team direction. Once the goals are clear or agreed upon, the group can then focus on formulating a plan of action to attain these goals. Leaders often utilize methodologies such as brainstorming to help a group gather ideas.

Leaders have the responsibility of being able to prioritize group goals and organize methods to attain them once a group process, such as brainstorming, has occurred. With so many potential ideas, suggestions, and solutions being offered up by the group, the leader must maintain focus in order to prioritize what needs the most immediate attention (Aldrich 2003). Leaders constantly feel the thrill of the challenge to achieve goals. They must operate with a "constructive spirit of discontent" to constantly elicit new ideas and fresh perspectives from the rest of the group. (Smith, 1996)

Finally, and the key to the success of any individual, leader or otherwise, is a strong understanding of who he or she is. Self-knowledge, especially in terms of personality strengths and weaknesses is essential. A group leader must be thick-skinned and mentally tough. He must be willing to criticize and be criticized without becoming discouraged. A group leader must have the respect of his or her peers (Smith, 1996). Smith goes on to say, “ Peer respect doesn’t reveal ability, but it can show character and personality. Tramell Crow, one of the worlds’ most successful real estate brokers, said that he looks for people whose associates want them to succeed”. An effective leader must make themselves part of the group, not differentiating his or her self from the group because of group leader status. Most importantly, they must lead with integrity to maintain credibility and foster trust with the other group members.

A group leader must have the patience to coach, as well as lead. A sense of humor and a positive out look are essential, particularly when team morale is low or team members are frustrated or discouraged. There is nothing motivating about a group leader who always looks at the glass half empty. One individual’s poor attitude, particularly when it is the group leader, can bring down the entire team. Finally, an effective group leader must be non-judgmental and never let personal feeling cloud his or her professional attitude. Leaders are well tuned to their own deficiencies in character or in skills and can put them aside for the larger goal. They may even gain strength from other group members who are stronger in certain areas than they themselves are. In this way the leader can not only lead by example, but also follow the good examples of his colleagues.

The topic of group leadership is of particular interest to me. As I write this paper I am in the midst of a group leadership crisis. I will give some background on the group's formation and dynamic. It is December 2002 and I am a Human Resources Assistant. I have three coworkers who share the same job title. One coworker has been employed in her current position for six years, one for two years and the last has been employed in Human Resources for close to twenty years but is new to this position; she is a former secretary. The four of us report to the Manager of Benefits. In January 2003 the Manager of Benefits is laid off. Hence, my four coworkers and I become the HR Support Center, now reporting to the Director of Human Resources. A few weeks later, our Director calls the four of us together and states, " With so much on my plate, I've decided to appoint a leader in the HR Support Center". This is where the trouble begins. She decides to appoint our coworker who has the most seniority in her current position. She has a high school education and no leadership experience.

The remaining three of us try to take the news in stride. We are very apprehensive of this new arrangement because through the years we have witnessed many behaviors from our group leaders that are not conducive to group leadership. First, our group leader has made no effort to get to know us as individuals. She briefly knows our strengths and quite by accident, not by any meaningful communications between her and us. She hasn't taken the time to learn our weaknesses and the weaknesses that do surface become a problem for her. She is very easily frustrated and lacks the patience for coaching us through new situations. Our group leader makes has no intention of sharing the group's goals with its members.

We learn of projects and deadlines in crisis mode. There is no planning between the group members and the leader, only instructions given to us. She has a very low stress level and intolerance for mistakes or learning curves required to grasp a new skill. This has led to quite a few hostile and verbally aggressive incidents between her and the three of us. Last week, the three of us had finally reached our limit after one of these particular incidents and called an emergency meeting with our Director. We voiced our concerns and she was very receptive and listened to us quite the way a good leader should. She told us that she did have our group leader signed up to attend some group leadership seminars, but admitted it may not be enough or it may be too late for the group. As, there was no immediate remedy she allowed the group leader to meet with her privately and express her views on the happenings within the group. The Director, has let us know that after hearing everyone's point of view, she will be making changes within the group, whether they be organizational, physical or job related.

I believe this is a perfect example of why it is so important to choose a group leader wisely. Group leaders need to know their group, their goals and themselves. There needs to be certain personality traits. A group leader needs to know the individuals within a group before he or she can know what a group can accomplish. There needs to be a desire to lead but at the same time teach with patience. A leader cannot let their own desire to lead cloud the goals of the group as a whole. An effective group leader must be able to admit his or her weaknesses and be willing to constantly improve. I have experienced how quickly a group can be turned in the wrong direction through ineffective group leadership. Some leaders may be born, while

others may be made, but any leader is only as good as the group he or she leads.

References

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