

Common Qualities of Leadership

Leadership styles are as varied as the leaders themselves. Some are outgoing and charismatic, others more reflective and deliberate. But certain principles or qualities seem to characterize effective leaders.

1. Effective Leaders Make Others Feel Important

If your goals and decisions are based on self-interest and personal advancement, followers will soon lose their enthusiasm and loyalty. Take the time to emphasize their strengths and contributions, not your own.

2. Effective Leaders Promote a Vision

Followers need a clear idea of where you're leading them. They need to understand why that destination is valuable to them and that vision must remain constant. A "Vision of the Week" will quickly turn enthusiasm into cynicism. As Daniel S. Harkavy observed, "When you lack a vision, you are continually starting, stopping and redirecting." Your job as leader is to provide the crystalline vision that serves as the rallying cry for your organization.

3. Effective Leaders Follow the Golden Rule

Treat your followers the way you enjoy being treated. "You do not lead by hitting people over the head - that's assault, not leadership." (US President Dwight D. Eisenhower) An abusive leader attracts few devoted followers.

4. Effective Leaders Admit Mistakes

If people suspect that you're covering up your own errors, they'll hide their mistakes as well. This lack of candor will shield you from valuable decision-making information.

5. Effective Leaders Criticize Others Only in Private

Genuine and deserved public praise encourages loyalty, dedication and excellence. But public criticism only embarrasses and alienates. Be careful of your satire or sarcasm - it may be have been intended as jest yet received far differently.

6. Effective Leaders Stay Close to the Action

Leaders need to be visible to the members of their organization. Talk to people, develop real relationships, visit other offices and work sites, ask questions and observe how business is being handled. You will often gain new insights into your work and find new opportunities for motivating your followers.

Jack Dunigan of "Leadership Ministries"