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"Seven Ironclad Attributes of an Exceptional Leader"

The following is an excerpt from "[Millennials into Leadership: The Ultimate Guide for Gen Y's Aspiring to Be Effective, Respected, Young Leaders at Work](#)" by Lisa Orrell. An excerpt of the [book's introduction](#) can also be found in the Knowledge Network.

We all know much has been written on the subject of leadership and many business writers and motivational speakers have codified the attributes they believe are essential for leaders. Frequently, however, their descriptions focus upon traits that make a leader personable, affable and well-liked. It's nice to be liked, but: Leadership is not (just) a popularity contest. As a young leader, you will be faced with making decisions that won't make everyone happy. And that's okay. As long as your employees respect you, the ones who were not happy with your decision will (normally) get over it.

We live in a time plagued by cynicism and doubt, especially in regards to leaders and their motives, not only in corporate, but also government. This creates a special challenge for young leaders today who need to be trusted and respected in order to achieve the kind of 'popularity' that will enable them to achieve success, as well.

- When the leader is respected, which means they are at the very least trusted and probably liked as well, then this enables the leader to make proposals that followers will take seriously.
- If the respect for the leader is strong, then the followers will likely accept the solution being offered, even if they are not that convinced by the arguments that the leader is putting forward.
- If the leader is not respected, then people will follow them only if they see no other viable choice. But people will also (eventually) leave and seek a leader they do respect.

Someone Has to Follow the Leader

Almost everyone can describe the characteristics of an exceptional leader. Their descriptions may be based on a single great boss or on a collage of desirable features that they recognized in several leaders, but most people seem to have some idea of what's

essential. But whatever else might be true about the role, you're not a good "leader" unless you have followers who respect you.

Leadership and management are often used in the same breath, largely because those who are appointed managers seek also to be leaders. I mentioned this in the previous chapter, but to recap (briefly), here are 2 key points:

- Managers have subordinates who obey commands in a basic transaction of obedience in return for pay and conditions. But when working for manager without strong leadership qualities, who you don't respect, you (as an employee) are probably on the lookout for another job. Basically, you just don't want to have to report to that person ever again.
- Good leaders, however, have followers who choose to follow them. And good leaders often have followers who are happy to be working for them, and compensation isn't their number one priority. They may even get job offers for more pay, but they just really like their boss and don't want to risk getting a new one that makes their lives miserable. And, yes, a bad boss makes your life miserable, so don't be one.

Role Reversal

The role of leader has many facets. Good leaders pay close attention to followers to ensure their ongoing motivation and if followers' buy-in decreases, then the leader must act to re-motivate them. This creates a leader-follower inversion, in which the leader becomes the follower and vice versa.

In this way, the roles of leader and follower are fluid. There is a constant shift of influence and motivation. A good leader, however, doesn't let the employees ultimately run the show. He/she always remains at the helm.

Pied Piper Power Play

A leader's power is not inherently good or bad, but just part of the equation. The power dynamic exists in leadership relationships because leadership is a process of influence, and power provides influence potential.

A leader's potential to influence others, to give them a reason to follow, flows from the leader's base of power. When used correctly, that power enables leaders to influence because the leader is trusted, revered and/or considered an expert.

An interesting comment on this comes from the arena...not the business arena, but the sports arena. Iconic NFL quarterback Joe Namath said, "To be a leader, you have to make people want to follow you, and nobody wants to follow someone who doesn't know where he is going."

What do successful leaders do to become effective Pied Pipers? What separates a leader from being a basic manager? And why do so many managers fail to live up to their leadership potential? The answer can be found, in part, in the attributes below.

7 Ironclad Attributes of an Exceptional Leader

The following (7) attributes are reflections of character and personal integrity. They must be developed through self-discipline, time and pressure; they are not inherited and cannot not be “faked” successfully...at least not for long.

Attribute #1 – Sets High Standards: Leaders set high standards for their followers...and themselves. Successful leaders are consistent in demanding of themselves compliance with the standards that they espouse. Those who do not are only fooling themselves.

Attribute #2 – Lives Up to Those Standards: Leaders live up to the standards they have set. Nothing disqualifies a would-be leader faster than a double standard, one for them and another for those under their authority. Subordinates will quickly see through the duplicity, and loyalty will rapidly be replaced by disgust, grudging obedience, and resignation letters.

Attribute #3 – Mentors Those Who Follow: We all need guidance. However many mediocre leaders expect their followers to attain the standards set by their leadership without ever teaching them exactly how. Effective leaders, on the other hand, invest themselves in their followers. They make a concerted effort to communicate verbally not only what is expected, but how to achieve it.

Attribute #4 – Creates and Shares a Vision: Effective leaders are driven by a singular vision, not of what is, but of what will be. And they make sure that everyone around them understands and buys into that vision of where the organization (and/or department) is going and what is necessary to attain that goal. A splintered vision, or one that is implemented in a fragmented manner, will always result in competing interests within the organization, vying for resources, and each person thinking their particular function and sphere of effort is most important. This is when employee morale takes a plunge.

Attribute #5 – Makes the Hard Choices When Necessary: Effective leaders are characterized by a willingness to make the hard decisions when necessary...and sometimes under extreme pressure. Yet it is human nature that in the face of crisis, stall...keep all the options open. True leaders, however, don't stall. They assess and execute. They know that stalling, or going into a state of denial, just makes things worse.

Attribute #6 – Is Visible: In today's far flung organizations spanning continents, in your organization, whatever its size, do people really know where the buck stops? Do customers and staff alike have a clear and constant sense that someone, a real person, not voicemail, is really in charge? To command respect, which is a key component of trust and which is, in turn, the essential ingredient for creating followers, leaders must be highly visible. I know many mid-level managers who stay hidden in their offices...rarely meeting with employees, avoiding customers (thinking their sales reps can handle them), and basically avoiding anything that remotely looks like a “leadership” quality. Don't let that be you.

Attribute #7 – Instills Hope in Those Who Follow: The final attribute of successful leaders is their ability to instill hope. None of us can continue to grow, develop and perform at our highest potential without hope. Hope for success, hope for recognition and

reward, and most importantly, hope that indeed we can make a difference in the long-term outcome. Hope supplies the essential fuel that enables the human spirit to continue moving forward, especially in the face of severe adversity. Be a young leader who instills hope in your team, as a group and as individuals. Even though this book is all about you, it's ultimately for them.

Coach Lisa's Comments:

Sure, the title on your business card, and your role within your company, will come with inherent respect. But it stops there. If you don't possess the attributes of a good leader, and work at becoming an effective one, on an on-going basis, the title on your card won't matter. Your co-workers, employees, and supervisors, will lose respect for you, and trust will disappear.

The only person that can maintain and build your status as an effective leader is you. And let me share something you may not be aware of: I talk to many older employees that are now managed by Millennials. And they are not resentful about it. But their frustration often comes from the fact that they (some, not all) say their young boss thinks they know everything, disregard other peoples' opinions, rarely ask for input from their teams, communicate in a condescending way, and tend to manage based on ego.

Now I realize there are many of you that have older bosses who manage the way I just described. But why should you be one of them? Why not work on your personal leadership style to only encompass traits that make you respected, well-liked, and effective?

The old school of traditional management and leadership styles has created a workforce where 60% of employees are dissatisfied and disengaged. I challenge you to bring in a new era of leadership that reduces that statistic! The attributes and principles in this book are best practices that the most effective leaders in our history, and those currently employed, possess.

This isn't rocket science; it's common sense! And the time to change the "negative" attitudes in the workforce is now, and that comes from good leadership...and you must lead the charge!