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What Makes a Good Leader?

4-5 minutes

There are many definitions of leadership. The Collins English dictionary defines leadership as “the leader(s) of a party or group.” Yet true leadership is much more than that. A leader can be the CEO of an organization or a first year employee who leads his or her team to success behind the scenes. A leader might lead through official authority and power. Yet, just as often great leaders lead through inspiration, persuasion and personal connections.

So what is leadership? One great definition is:

“Leadership is the art of leading others to deliberately create a result that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.”

It’s not just the creation of results that makes good leadership. Good leaders are able to deliberately create challenging results by enlisting the help of others. They can single handedly turn failing companies into Fortune 500 organizations. They can change company cultures. Good leadership is an *essential* key to corporate success.

The Characteristics of a Good Leader

What makes a good leader? Here are some of their most important characteristics:

Self-Awareness. You have an intimate knowledge of your inner emotional state. You know your strengths and your weaknesses. You know when you're working in flow and you know when you're over worked. You know yourself, including your capabilities and your limitations, which allows you to push yourself to your maximum potential.

Self-Direction. You're able to direct yourself effectively and powerfully. You know how to get things done, how to organize tasks and how to avoid procrastination. You know how to generate energy for projects, to calm yourself when angered. You can make decisions quickly when necessary, but can also slow to consider all the options on the table.

Vision. You're working towards a goal that's greater than yourself. It could be something small, like the success of the team, or a larger vision like world peace. Working towards a vision is far more inspiring than working towards personal gain.

Ability to Motivate. Leaders don't lead by telling people what they *have* to do. Instead, leaders cause people to *want* to help them. A key part of this is cultivating your own desire to help others. When others sense that you want to help them, they in turn want to help you.

Social Awareness. Understanding social networks and key influencers in that social network is another key part of leadership. Who in the organization has the most clout, both officially and unofficially? Who moves the hearts of the group?

These are some of the most important characteristics of good leaders.

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Most of these traits tie directly into emotional intelligence (EQ). Leaders with high EQ are intrinsically more self aware. They understand their mental processes and know how to direct themselves. They're more in touch with what they're deeply passionate about. They naturally care more for others and receive more compassion in return. They're more socially in tune.

Leadership is more often than not about "soft skills" rather than hard skills. Yes, a leader who understands what drives the bottom line is valuable. Yet, it's the leader who can get *others* to perform at their best who ultimately creates winning organizations.

What are some of the main ways you see your leadership skills impacting your workplace performance?

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