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Consultants for Leadership Selection

13 Characteristics of Exceptional Leaders

By Bruce Dingman

Not all leaders in major positions of responsibility or influence are exceptional in their leadership abilities. Conversely, some of the very best leaders or managers are in positions that don't have great responsibility or influence. Some of these characteristics of incredible leaders come naturally....and some are learned. There are 13 qualities of exceptional leaders, but bear in mind, a person need not necessarily have all these characteristics to be highly effective.

Knows himself - knowing one's own strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes are crucial insights into knowing how to work with or lead others to get the desired results.

Secure in who one is - this allows the person to act or react with perspective, rather than out of insecurity. For example when someone is secure, they are more apt to hire a person stronger or smarter than themselves, helping to create a strong team.

Quite self-confident – like with any successful athlete, self-confidence creates an atmosphere of positive expectation that aids significantly in achieving great results; others will expect the confident but realistic leader to be successful in reaching his/her goals; be careful that one is not over-confident or have unrealistic, unachievable goals. Arrogance is a turn-off to followers; one needs a healthy amount of confidence, but not too little nor too much.

Varied approach – deals with people individually, understanding where a person is emotionally and then using the approach that will get the optimum response.

Has a contagious enthusiasm – casts the vision causing people to want to be onboard.

Authenticity – what you see is who they are; transparent and consistent.

Stretches people – helps people to know and believe in themselves and motivates them to achieve higher levels of professionalism, leadership and/or productivity.

Supports their staff – gives their team the resources needed, encourages them to go beyond their comfort zone and learn from failures and stands up for his/her staff.

Encourages innovation – may or may not be creative him/herself, but encourages innovation, to think "out-of-the-box", and rewards the good ideas that result.

Keeps learning - a great leader will keep learning while encouraging his/her people to keep learning; to not keep improving, results in stagnation or even regression while the rest of the world moves ahead.

Understands how organizations work – many people never grasp how each department within an organization works in relationship with the others in order to achieve an objective; to maximize an organization's potential a leader must not only know how the pieces fit together but must have grown past having any partiality for the functional area from which he or she came.

"Big picture" perspective – top leadership must see not only the organization as a whole, but

the world in which the organization functions; for example, a Controller would be more effective seeing the company as a whole rather than just through an accountant's eyes and could never be an effective Chief Financial Officer without the "big picture" perspective.

Values both process and results – *entrepreneurs have a focus on results but often don't have much patience for developing the process or systems needed for consistency or to develop "buy-in" by others within the organization; bureaucrats may be so risk adverse or so value process that they are ineffective in getting timely results; in reality valuing both process and results is needed.*

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