

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

A leader is a person who provides the vision for the future. S/he is aware of the possibilities and can see where the group is headed, and then inspires others to come along with him or her. The ability to lead is not connected to education, although most leaders are intelligent people. Leading is a 'right-brain activity', more about creating and following vision than about structure and organization.

Good Leaders:

- **Have a clear vision of where the group is going.** As Steven Covey says in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the leader is the person who climbs the tallest tree, surveys the entire situation, and yells, "Wrong jungle!"
- **Are clear about the reality of whatever situation they are currently in, and also believe completely that they will eventually prevail.** This mindset is exemplified by the attitude of Admiral James Stockdale, who was the highest-ranking US military officer imprisoned in Viet Nam. He was a prisoner in the most horrible conditions for over eight years, and his description of those who survived and those who didn't illustrates this quality. He says that those who survived were not the optimists, who said "We'll be home by Christmas, or we'll be home by next Easter". For when those dates came and went, these men became more and more disheartened, and eventually died of a broken heart. Those who survived were the ones who "never lost faith in the end of the story. Those who never doubted not only that they would get out, but also that they would prevail in the end." Stockdale says, "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end - which you can never afford to lose-with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."
- **Are aware of what an asset people are and insure that they have the right ones in the right positions.** They then give these people the freedom to make decisions, take actions, and be responsible and accountable for them.
- **Listen well and lead with questions, not answers.** Leaders are much more interested in listening and learning than telling and directing. An old Chinese parable says "Seek to understand: only then to be understood" and this is how good leaders approach communication. Listen, listen, listen!
- **Respect people at all levels and always want to hear what they have to say.** Good leaders realize that everyone in their organization is equally valuable and important to the overall success of the business. All jobs are built on each other, and what the janitor does is just as important

as what the CEO does.

- **Have strong values and beliefs and live them in every area of their life.** Your team is aware of who you are and how you live, and will respect you if what you say is what you do. It's important to be congruent in all.
- **Possess positive self-esteem and are self-confident without being arrogant.** Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself and the person you are. People with positive self-esteem accept themselves 100% even though they are not perfect. It comes from within. This is often a work-in-progress. Self-confidence is how you feel about your ability to function in a given situation, and comes from responses or feedback from others.
- **Have the courage and strength to make difficult decisions.** Decision-making requires that you evaluate the entire situation and move in the direction where the outcome will benefit the most people and your organization. This involves evaluating the pros and cons of possible outcomes, and being willing to take a stand that may be unpopular if you feel it's the best way to go. Good leaders are also diplomatic about the way they do this, so people don't feel stepped on.
- **Are passionate about everything they do.** Leaders give their full attention and enthusiasm to whatever they are involved in.
- **Inspire greatness in others.** Effective leaders bring out the best in their team members. They know each one personally, understand their strengths, needs, goals and areas for development, and provide opportunities for individual growth. They let their people know how they are doing and offer praise often. If correction is needed, they give it privately and with respect, and focus on the positive and their belief in their team member's ability to improve
- **Give credit to others for successes, and accept personal responsibility for failures.** Good leaders believe that if there is a failure, it's his/her responsibility, if things are fine it's our doing, and if there is a success it's because of the team or an individual member. Some words and phrases that describe great leaders are: visionary, motivational, inspirational, accepting ultimate responsibility, courageous, realistic, focused on people and living a life of integrity.

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