

Leadership – a much maligned word!

Much has been said about what makes a great leader and what is leadership, but little is really understood. Leadership is often confused with management. Even the Thesaurus puts both words together as synonyms (the Oxford Dictionary does not even define the word). But, there are many great managers who are bad leaders. There are great leaders who are bad managers and, of course, there are those special people who are both.



Leadership is often confused with stridency, strength of character, height, and male. In fact, many world leaders are small – look at Hitler - and even others are small inspirational women such as – Mother Teresa, Aung San Suu Khee, Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, , and Hillary Clinton to name a few. The list goes on forever.

So what do we mean by the word ‘leadership’. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is to use a local home grown example – Tom Hedley.

Tom started off as a local plumber in 1969. He loved his work because his customers appreciated him and his ability to turn up on time, charge fair price and do a good job. Tom has grown this business into the largest construction company in Far North Queensland. In addition he has not been afraid to take risks which allowed him to step into unfamiliar and diversified fields such as hotels, gaming, child care and of course his passion for horses. He has not achieved all this from having a high profile, being outspoken, or seeking the limelight. Quite the opposite, Tom is essentially a shy man. What Tom does have is a natural leadership quality.

The first trait of a good leader is that he or she surrounds themselves with other leaders. A good leader finds the best people, and then develops them into the best leaders they can be. Why? - Because the people closest to a leader determine how successful the leader is. In other words, as a leader, those closest to you can ‘make or break’ you. In addition, the leaders around you help carry your other loads. The leaders around you serve as good sounding boards – they have a leadership mindset, so they think like you and therefore see your problems as their own.

Some believe that developing potential leaders around them could threaten their leadership. But true leaders know how to inspire and create new leaders. True leaders have faith in the leadership ability of others and help them develop these skills. True leaders are not threatened by people with great potential.

The American author and management guru, Peter Drucker, says *“The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say “I.” And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say “I.” They don’t think “I.” They think “we”; they think “team.” They understand their job to be- to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but “we” gets the credit... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.”*

How does a leader find other leaders to develop around him or her? Dale Carnegie, a master at identifying potential leaders, said *“People are developed the same way as gold is mined. Several tons of dirt must be moved before an ounce of gold is found. But you don’t go into the mine looking for the dirt. You go in looking for the gold.”*

To identify good leaders you must look for the gold in people - the good qualities, the strengths and abilities.

What are the other unique qualities inherent in good leaders? How do you recognise one if you come across them? They all have the following 10 characteristics (if you recognise them in yourself – know you are a leader):

- 1 **A Positive Attitude** – Leaders have a no-limit mindset. They are willing to try anything and always think positively. They are not restricted by self-imposed limitations.
- 2 **Good Character** – A leader is honest, has integrity, self discipline, dependability, consistency, perseverance, conscientiousness and a strong work ethic.
- 3 **Vision** – A leader has vision and can inspire those around them to see and aspire to that vision.
- 4 **Excellent People Skills** – Leaders have genuine concern for others, they understand people and interact and relate well with others. Leaders will recognise others accomplishments and successes. They will challenge people but also support and encourage them to achieve. In brief they truly understand the **BEST** principle when dealing with people.

B – Believe in them
E – Encourage them
S – Share with them
T – Trust them
- 5 **A Proven Track Record** – A leader is an achiever, they will always have a proven track record.

- 6 **Confidence** – people are naturally attracted to people with confidence. Good Leaders remain confident whatever the circumstances. They thrive on challenges and are creative in handling problems.
- 7 **Self Discipline** – Disciplined people know how to manage two things their emotions and their time. They are able to take the emotion out of any situation and put it in perspective.
- 8 **Effective Communication Skills** – Good leaders can communicate effectively. They have a genuine concern for the people they talk to, an ability to focus on the other person and place themselves in the others shoes. They have the skill to communicate with all kinds of people. An effective communicator also maintains eye contact and always has a warm smile ready.
- 9 **Influence** – a leader knows where they are going and is able to persuade others to come along with them.
- 10 **Discontent with the Status Quo** – Leaders are not willing to be satisfied with the status quo. They challenge the way things are done and are willing to break the mould, to be different and take risks. Leaders ask the provocative questions – ‘Why?’ And ‘What if?’ and ‘Is this the best we can do?’ Continuous challenging produces continuous improvement.

Do any of these attributes ring true with you. Are you underselling yourselves. In my years of mentoring people in business, I find that the main factor inhibiting their success is confidence in their own ability. .

How can you develop your confidence and self esteem?

- Firstly, it's about feeling good about yourself. Treat yourself to some new clothes, a haircut or massage, anything that helps you feel good about yourself.
- Take a moment to write down everything that you have achieved so far. It's amazing, when you look back you will find many previous successes. Pat yourself on the back you are great.
- Surround yourself with positive supportive people.
- Then get yourself a mentor. Ideally, it will be someone who is easily accessible to you, a person for whom you have respect for their ability and empathy. Everyone needs somebody to talk over issues and concerns, someone with whom you can brainstorm ideas and fears. Your mentor

should be supportive yet challenging, encourage initiative but also have the ability to criticise without being negative or judgmental.

- Set and pursue your goals, focus on results and hone your skills.
- Do not be afraid to make mistakes – everyone does – but learn from them.
- Give yourself some accolades, promote yourself, and seize the credit.

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