

CLD1-6



Significant Leadership Characteristics

Kristina G. Ricketts, Community and Leadership Development

Leadership can be seen all around us. From the local pastor to the county judge executive to the Little League baseball coach, leadership is played out in a variety of situations every day. Everyone has the opportunity to be a leader at some point, so it is important that every person have a strong understanding of what leadership is, what good leadership looks like, and how it can vary between individuals. Learning about leadership will make you much more effective the next time it is your turn to lead.

Leadership Basics

Leadership is important in a wide variety of situations. A good basic definition of leadership is *to influence others toward a shared goal*. Three important factors shape any leadership definition:

- **Group occurrence**—A leader can't practice leadership without at least one person following. Leaders are defined by the fact that they are leading or directing others along a specific path. The leader-follower relationship is an essential part of the process. Without that relationship, there is no leadership.
- **Directed by a goal**—A leader must be leading the group toward a shared goal in which followers believe. Over the last several years, leadership has evolved from a focus on leader-centered goals to follower-centered goals. Leaders have found it is much easier to motivate others toward a belief or action they believe in.

- **Structured**—Some type of structure is needed in the leader-follower relationship. A leader-follower relationship with no structure is merely chaos; structure provides the framework needed to successfully achieve goals.

Leadership Characteristics

Effective leaders share many common characteristics. Several of these characteristics are directly tied to the factors mentioned above. This is deliberate. So just sit back and think about the most successful leaders with whom you have worked, and you can probably identify a few of these common characteristics.

Qualities of effective leaders

- Confidence
- Consistency between word and action—"walking the talk"
- Creativity
- Active listening skills
- Efficient coaching skills
- Visioning
- Ability to inspire
- Long-term focus
- Ability to balance individual needs and team needs
- Awareness of realistic conditions
- Willingness to share credit or recognition
- Strong self-esteem
- Sense of priorities
- Service mentality
- Sincerity
- Technical expertise
- Trust
- Willingness to share responsibility



Character matters; leadership descends from character.

—Rush Limbaugh

Leadership—to influence others toward a shared goal.



Relationship vs. Task-oriented Leadership

In general, most effective leaders display many of the characteristics listed above. Still, there have been some basic differences noted between leadership approaches. Behavioral studies showed us we could train people to be leaders and agreed there were two dimensions of leader behavior – either being task or relationship-oriented. A “relationship-oriented” leader thinks about the needs of his or her team members first, and then decides how to go about the task. “Task-oriented” leaders approach things differently; first, they think about different aspects of the task, and then consider how the leader-follower relationship will be affected. Both approaches are valid and play important roles within in the area of leadership.

Still, there are clear differences. Leaders with a more relationship-oriented point-of-view tend to lead in a more democratic, or participative manner. “Relational” leaders are often more transformational, which can be illustrated through inspiring motivation or giving more individualized attention to one’s followers. Finally, relational leaders are more inclined to reward successful follower behaviors than more task-oriented leaders.

Task-oriented leaders tend to be more autocratic, or directive in their leadership style. Due to this, these “directive” leaders have been found to be more successful in military settings, emergency situations, and places where there are a large number of male employees. Unlike relationship-oriented leaders, task-oriented leaders are more likely to ask for what they want, and this skill at negotiation often means more

raises and promotions for these individuals within organizations. Often, leaders who place their primary focus on the task are thought to be more effective, and have fewer stereotypes to deal with in work situations.

In general, an individual’s leadership approach can affect his or her leadership success. Task and relationship-oriented leaders each have different strengths, and are more effective within different leadership situations. So it isn’t about saying one leadership approach is more effective than the other; it is more about matching the right type of leader with the right situation. Understanding the differences between task and relationship-oriented leadership is just one tool in helping to you to be the most effective leader you can be.

Summary

Just as specific factors contribute to an accurate definition of leadership, there are common characteristics shared by effective leaders. Realizing what characteristics are associated with successful leaders is important for personal leadership development and helps give the individual a clear picture of who he or she is as a leader. The same is true for different leadership approaches. By understanding which situations are more appropriate for task or relationship-oriented individuals, people can be put into the right situations in order to excel as leaders.

References

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