

The New Supervisor's Handbook



Julian Talbot

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ISBN-13: 978-1479296255

ISBN-10: 1479296252

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"A leader is a dealer in hope."

- Napoleon Bonaparte

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Table of Contents

About This Handbookvii
Leadership	1
Principles of Leadership	1
What Is Leadership?	2
What Type of Leader Are You?	3
Leadership Myths	7
Traits of a Leader.	12
Communication	21
Communication Styles	22
The Art of Active Listening	26
Non-Verbal Communication.	31
Team Meetings	38
Team Briefings.	39
Brainstorming and Facilitation.	40
Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE)	43
Time Management.	47

Management Systems	49
Management Policies	53
Decision Making and Problem Solving	59
The Eightfold Path of Problem Solving	61
Root Causes and the Ishikawa Diagram	73
Performance Management	77
Motivation	77
Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation	78
Counseling and Discipline	79
General Notes	80
Conducting Counseling or Discipline Interviews	83
Report Writing	89
Gaining Experience	93
Some Final Thoughts	97
Appendix: Recommended Reading	101
A Corporate Tool	103

About This Handbook

“Effective leadership is not about making speeches or being liked; leadership is defined by results not attributes.”

Peter Drucker

I wrote this book for new managers and supervisors. It’s basically a short list of some of the things I wish someone had told me when I got my first promotion.

Being a first-time supervisor is a scary thing. It’s great, but it’s daunting, complex, and uncertain. There seem to be so many more ways to mess up than to do things right. After three decades of management experience and hard-won lessons, I’ve tried to distill a few key lessons I came across in those early days. A boss of mine once told a friend, “At least Julian never makes the same mistake twice.” I’m pretty sure that’s not true, but I think my friend’s reply summed me up when she responded: “So he’s pretty creative, then?” Indeed, I seem to have made so many mistakes along the way that I must have invented a few new ones. In hindsight, that’s probably a good thing. It didn’t always feel like a good thing, however—that is, until one day I came across the simple truth: The secret to success is to fail more often.

When asked for a formula for success, Thomas John Watson, Sr., the founder of IBM, stated, “It’s quite simple, really. Double your rate of failure. You are thinking of failure as the enemy of success. But it isn’t at all. You can be discouraged by failure or you can learn from it. So go ahead and make mistakes. Make all you can. Because remember, that’s where you will find success.”

Failing more often is definitely a path to success, but it’s not the only one. Indeed, you can travel a much shorter path if someone gives you a map of the terrain and a survival guide. That’s where this book comes in. It’s not overly long or complex. I’ve tried to stay away from management theory and academic ideas on leadership. This is a book for the first-time supervisor and it is designed to help you bypass a few of the traps I’ve made for myself and then fallen into. You’ll no doubt create your own traps, but when you do, hopefully you’ll find something in here to help you fashion a rope and haul your way out of the mess.

I can remember someone sending me some tips on counseling employees, just after I’d made a complete hash of a counseling interview. I thought, “If only my friend had sent this to me *last week*...” With the benefit of hindsight, activities like learning, gaining experience, counseling, and a hundred others are easy. I don’t even know what I was worried about. But as my friend pointed out, I’m creative, so I’m perpetually learning from yesterday’s mistake.

One of the lessons I learned was that by investing a bit of time to learn from the experience of others, I can spare myself some headaches. And hopefully you will, too.

The workplace today is a constantly evolving environment, and assuming the role of leader is a challenging and rewarding experience. You will find yourself supervising staff who have varying levels of experience and motivation. Even if you have many years of management experience, you will still find a few useful pointers in here—if only to help the supervisors who report to you.

As a supervisor and leader, you have only two basic responsibilities: achieving the organization’s objectives and ensuring the welfare of the people who report to you. I have compiled this handbook to provide you with guidance and some tools that can help you with the day-to-day supervision of your staff. In this

book, you will find that I use the terms “supervisor” and “manager” interchangeably.

It is my hope that this book, apart from shedding some light on frequent mistakes and saving you the worry about them, will also encourage you to develop your leadership skills. I urge you to seek out further resources and training in leadership. It is one of the most challenging of professional disciplines to master, and there’s always something more to learn!

I wish you the best of luck on what is likely to be one of the most rewarding journeys you will undertake—helping others reach their full potential.

Julian Talbot, 2014

Leadership

"Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. The best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will say we have done it ourselves."

- Lao Tzu

Principles of Leadership

"I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people."

- Mahatma Gandhi

The essence of leadership is accomplishing things through other people. Much has been written on the topic of leadership; indeed, it is a complex field worthy of lifelong study. If I had to give you my top tips in a single list, the list would read as follows. I think you could benefit from simply embracing the following principles:

1. Be a role model.
2. Be yourself.
3. Practice active listening.
4. Praise effectively.
5. State clear expectations.

6. Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
7. Be technically and tactically proficient.
8. Develop a sense of responsibility among your staff.
9. Make sound and timely decisions.
10. Know your staff and look out for their welfare.
11. Keep your team informed.
12. Seek responsibility, and take responsibility for your actions.
13. Ensure that assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished.
14. Train your staff as a team.

What Is Leadership?

"Leadership: The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

Leadership is the actions by one or more persons that influence (guide) the behavior of one or more persons in a group setting. These actions by the leader and/or the group are often intentional in that they are meant to influence, or to change, the behavior of other people. The actions must be successful, at least in part, if they are to be regarded as the results of the leadership. Attempts to change behavior that do not result in any changes are exactly what they sound like: unsuccessful attempts at leadership. The psychologist Martin Chelmers defined leadership as "a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task."

Leadership does not follow a specific style or process. The style or type of leadership that is effective in one situation may not work very well in another. There are dozens of effective styles and types of leaders. Furthermore, there is no one style that is universally effective. However, and as we will discuss later, good communication skills are essential for *all* types of leadership.

Many types of leadership, especially long-term or political leadership, require the ability to separate personalities from issues. People associate issues with

personalities. Many people carry grudges against others from former clashes, and understandably this interferes with any hopes of collaborating together in the future. It is often necessary to separate friendship roles from leadership roles. In many positions, such as on committees and project teams, you may be cooperating with another member on one issue and opposing him on another issue, perhaps at the same time. This requires keeping personality and profession separate from one another; in other words, these issues should not become personal. Granted, this is a most difficult endeavor, especially for inexperienced managers. The attainment of such a skill—one that is not actively pursued (nor always needed) by many—requires considerable practice. The saying “Don’t take the argument out of the room” is very difficult for many people to achieve, but it becomes easier over time and with practice.

What Type of Leader Are You?

“It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.”

- Nelson Mandela

Everyone has her own style of leadership, and above all, it is important to *be yourself*. Be authentic! There are a number of behaviors we can all learn from to improve our leadership skills. Among these are the three most basic styles of leadership:

- Autocratic (authoritarian) leadership
- Democratic (participative) leadership
- Laissez-faire (delegative) leadership

Each style has its own strengths and weaknesses, but they all share a very significant commonality: their flexibility. Remember that the underlying principle behind being a good leader is the concept of *situational leadership*. In other words,

different situations call for different leadership styles. Every wise leader knows this. In an emergency such as a military engagement or a catastrophe, when there is little or no time to come to agreement and when a designated authority has significantly more experience or expertise than the rest of the team, an autocratic leadership style may be most effective. Among a highly motivated and aligned team with a homogeneous level of expertise, however, a more democratic or laissez-faire style may be best. The style adopted should be the one that most effectively achieves the objectives of that particular group while balancing the interests of its individual members.

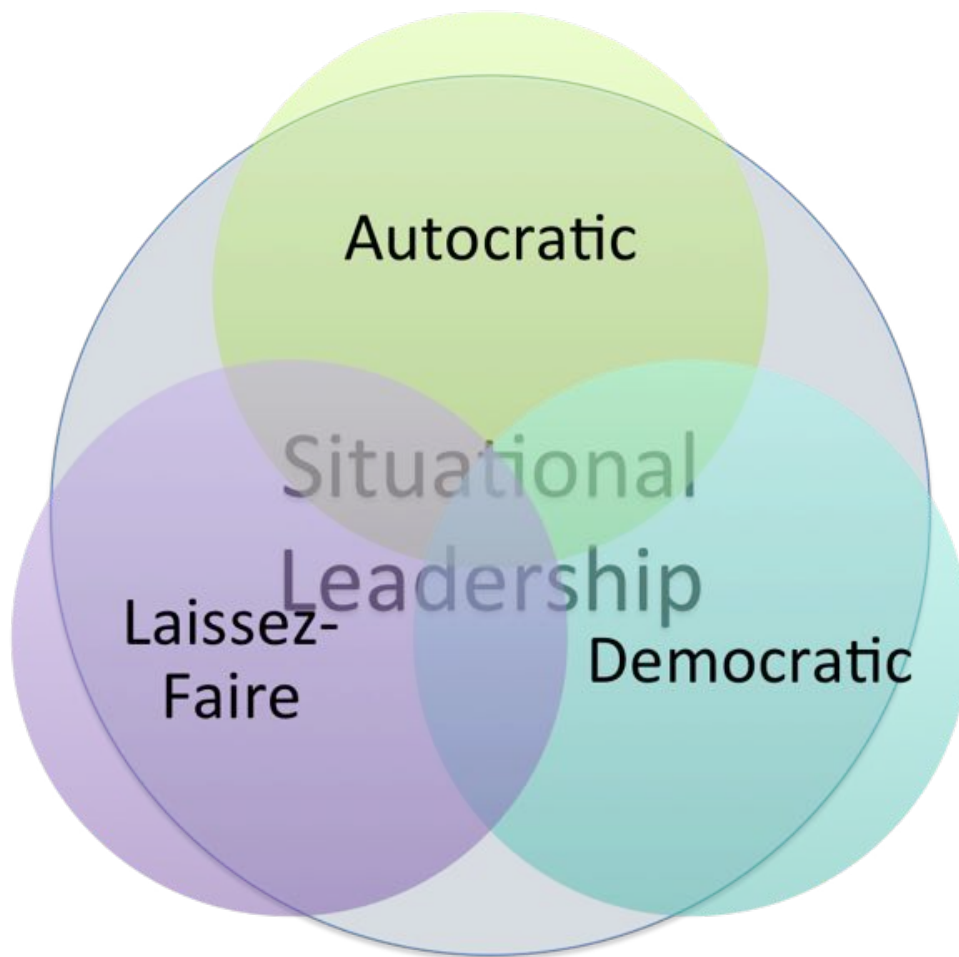


Figure 1: Leadership styles

The effective leader manages to use all three styles of leadership when and where appropriate, without ever going to extremes with any particular style.

Autocratic (Authoritarian) Style

Under autocratic leadership, all decision-making powers are centralized with the leader; a dictatorship is one such example. These leaders do not entertain any suggestions or initiatives from subordinates. The autocratic management style, also called the *authoritarian style*, provides strong motivation to the manager and permits quick decision making because only one person decides for the whole group and can keep each decision to himself until feeling the need to share with the rest of the group.

This is often considered the classical approach. It is one in which the manager retains as much power and decision-making authority as possible. The manager does not consult employees, nor are they allowed to provide any input. Employees are expected to obey orders without receiving any explanations. The driving force of motivation is produced by creating a structured set of rewards and punishments.

This leadership style can be extremely effective if used judiciously and at appropriate times. Most staff, however, do not respond well to this management style, particularly if it's used excessively. But again, autocratic leadership is not all bad. At certain times, such as in the types of situations below, it is the most effective style to use.

- There is limited time in which to make a decision (e.g., emergency response or military engagements).
- Untrained employees do not know which tasks to perform or which procedures to follow.
- Employees do not respond to any other leadership style. (This is a rare situation).
- There are high-volume production needs on a daily basis.
- Another employee challenges a manager's power.

The autocratic leadership style is likely to be counterproductive in situations in which the staff can reasonably expect to have their opinions heard, decision making requires input from subject-matter experts (e.g., when complex problems need to be solved), or when morale is low and turnover and absenteeism are high.

Participative (Democratic) Style

The democratic leadership style encourages the leader to share her decision-making abilities with group members by promoting the interests of the group members and by practicing social equality. The democratic leadership style is also called the *participative style*, as it welcomes employees as a part of the decision-making process. The democratic manager keeps his employees informed about everything that affects their work and shares decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities. Moreover, this style requires the leader to be a coach who has the final say but gathers information from staff members before making a decision.

Democratic leadership can produce high-quality and high-quantity work for long periods of time. Many employees like the trust they receive, and they tend to respond with cooperation, team spirit, and high morale. Typically, the democratic leader develops plans to help employees evaluate their own performance and encourages them to establish goals.

Like the other styles, the democratic style is not always appropriate. It is most successful in the following situations:

- Employees are highly skilled or experienced.
- Operational changes must be implemented.
- A manager must resolve individual or group problems.

As a general rule, this style of leadership is the most productive in the modern workplace. It's particularly effective in situations in which you want staff to participate in decision-making and problem-solving duties, when you want to provide opportunities for people to develop a high sense of personal growth and job satisfaction, and when changes have to be made or problems solved that directly affect employees. It's also the right approach when you have a large or complex problem (such as a safety issue) that requires significant input from a range of subject-matter experts.

Democratic leadership should not be used when there isn't enough time to get everyone's input, when staff may have a conflict of interest (voting on their

own pay raises, for instance), or if the team simply doesn't have the necessary expertise.

Laissez-Faire (Delegative) Style

A person may be in a leadership position without providing leadership, basically leaving the group to fend for itself. Subordinates are given a free hand in deciding their own policies and methods. Laissez-faire leadership, also known as *delegative leadership*, is a type of leadership style in which leaders are hands-off and allow group members to make the decisions. Researchers have found that this is the style that generally leads to the lowest productivity among group members. Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by very little guidance from leaders, complete freedom for the team to make decisions, and situations in which team members are expected to solve problems on their own.

Nevertheless, laissez-faire leadership can be effective in situations in which group members are highly skilled, motivated, and capable of working on their own. While the term for this style implies a completely hands-off approach, many leaders still remain open and available to group members for consultation and feedback.

Laissez-faire leadership is not ideal in situations in which group members lack the knowledge or experience they need to complete tasks and make decisions. Some people are not good at setting their own deadlines, managing their own projects, or solving problems on their own. In such situations, projects can run off-track and deadlines might be missed when team members do not receive enough guidance or feedback from their leader.

Leadership Myths

"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."

- Peter Drucker

Leadership, although largely talked about, has been described as one of the least understood concepts across all cultures and civilizations. Over the years, many

researchers have stressed the prevalence of this misunderstanding, stating that the existence of several flawed assumptions, or myths, concerning leadership often interferes with individuals' conceptions of what leadership is all about.

Myth 1: Leaders are egotistical.

No, not necessarily. Real leaders don't need to lead 100 percent of the time. They are able to contribute and accept the leadership of others. Not only that; they know the power of relationships, respect, communication, and humility—all key elements in being a successful leader. These are not egoistical attributes.

Myth 2: Leadership is a rare ability.

Given the fact that there are leaders everywhere, it's not as rare an ability as one might think. Without leaders inspiring people to accomplish common goals, little would actually get done in this world. On most teams, every person who participates acts as a leader on occasion within her work group, company, industry, or community, in their own area of expertise whether or not she is acknowledged as such.

Myth 3: The person with the highest title is the leader.

Well, that depends on your definition of leadership. If you accept that a large part of leadership is in one's ability to influence his own response to situations, that person can be in any role and any position to do that. It's not the sole reserve of the senior management team.

Real leaders are acknowledged by their peers, supervisors, and subordinates. It's not a matter of one's position within an organization. It's a matter of who has the best skills, knowledge, and resources to enable the team to achieve a particular shared goal.

Myth 4: Leaders only give orders.

While a leader may occasionally have to give an order or make a decision in a vacuum, the best leaders inspire rather than order. They do this by building

relationships, a procedure that allows them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the contributors in their organization. Then they use this knowledge to position all contributors in a way that allows them to best succeed so that the group, as a whole, reaches its goal.

In Western cultures, it is generally assumed that group leaders make all the difference when it comes to group influence and overall goal attainment. Although common, this romanticized view of leadership ignores the existence of many other factors that influence group dynamics. For example, group cohesion, communication patterns among members, individual personality traits, group context, and the nature or orientation of the work, as well as behavioral norms and established standards, all influence group functionality in varying capacities. For this reason, it is unwarranted to assume that all leaders are in complete control of their given group's achievements.

Leadership is about the future, not the past. Ralph Waldo Emerson summed it up well when he said, "Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be." Good leaders gain followers out of respect and their ability to cause people to work toward a particular goal—and the greater that goal, the more inspiring it is. People follow because they can relate to the vision or goal personalized by the leader. A good leader helps people become better than they are. A good leader creates a work environment that attracts, keeps, and motivates its workforce.

Myth 5: Leaders are extroverts.

Leaders aren't all extroverts. There are actually highly successful leaders who are introverts. Half of the leaders whom I've ever known (including my current boss, the successful founder and leader of a seventy million dollar organization) are introverts. The ability to communicate well with a wide variety of people and to be comfortable addressing groups is part of leadership, but many leaders have had to dig deep to discover these abilities within themselves. Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, and Hilary Clinton—just three of the most celebrated leaders of the twenty-first century—are all chronic introverts. And it hasn't stopped them one iota!

Myth 6: Leaders command a following.

Although leadership is certainly a form of power, it is not demarcated by power over people; rather, it is a power *with* people and one that exists as a reciprocal relationship between a leader and his followers. Contrary to popular belief, the use of manipulation, coercion, or domination to influence others is *not* a requirement for leadership. In actuality, individuals who seek group consent and strive to act in the best interests of others have the potential to become exceptionally effective leaders (e.g., class president, court judge).

Real leaders recognize that people aren't waiting eagerly for their next command. There are times when project plans conflict with other events; key people who might need to participate might not be able to; and sometimes there's nothing you can do about it, even as a leader.

Myth 7: Followers exist to support a leader.

The best form of leadership is *servant leadership*, a term often attributed to Robert K. Greenleaf, who is considered the founder of the servant leadership movement. Servant leaders contribute to the well-being of an organization by striving to meet other people's needs. The accomplishments of a team of inspired contributors will always outstrip the accomplishments of teams that are not personally invested in either the goal or their commitment to a leader. When leaders focus on serving the members of their team, treating them as individuals rather than a faceless group, relationships form that are based on loyalty, trust, and respect. It's those relationships that inspire people to "go the extra mile" when a project gets tough because their *hearts* are invested in it, not just their heads.

Myth 8: Leaders are chosen by other people.

The common perception is that leaders are leaders only because other people chose them to be. But in fact, leaders have to first acknowledge the desire to lead. If you don't put yourself out there as a prospective leader, people aren't just going to appoint you as one. Once you step out and offer yourself, people will either confirm or deny your leadership. People don't choose leaders; they acknowledge them.

In fact, there is a school of thought that says leaders are chosen because they convey a message that people believe in and support. Overall, my experience is that others decide if you are a good leader based on their experience of you, but typically leaders are self-appointed. Only you can really decide if you want to be a leader or not.

Myth 9: Leaders are born.

All leaders are born into this world, but they are not necessarily born as leaders. We're all born. What we do with what we have before we die is up to us. According to some, leadership is determined by distinctive characteristics present at birth (e.g., extraversion, intelligence, ingenuity). However, it is important to note that leadership also develops through hard work and careful observation. Thus, effective leadership can result from nature (i.e., innate talents) as well as nurture (i.e., acquired skills).

Few of us remain the person we were when we were born. We are shaped by our surroundings and nurtured by those who raise us. All behavior is learned, including leadership behavior.

Myth 10: All groups have a designated leader.

Despite preconceived notions, not all groups need a designated leader. Groups that are primarily composed of collaborative individuals, are limited in size, are free from stressful decision making, or that exist only for a short period of time (e.g., project teams, casual sporting teams) often undergo a diffusion of responsibility, with leadership tasks and roles being shared among members.

Again, this depends on your definition of leadership. If you believe leadership is the art of bringing out the best in others, why restrict that to work? What about leadership in your relationships with your significant other, your children, and your friends? Leadership is *influence*, and we exert influence all the time on the people with whom we interact. Good leaders do that well to achieve mutually beneficial results.

Myth 11: Group members resist leaders.

Group members actually tend to be more contented and productive when they have a leader to guide them. Although individuals filling leadership roles can be a direct source of resentment for followers, most people appreciate the contributions that leaders make to their groups and, consequently, welcome the guidance of a leader.

Traits of a Leader

"An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a particular field."

- Niels Bohr

The equation for success as a leader is very simple: The more leadership traits (tools) you develop, the greater the probability of your success in most types of leadership—and, indeed, in most careers. Below are fourteen traits of effective leaders. The fourteen leader traits + motivation = successful leadership!

1. Personable

An outgoing personality—the ability to enjoy “working the crowd”—is a very useful skill, both in the role of leadership and in many other parts of life. I have a friend who, whenever he is in a meeting or at a party, makes sure that he greets every single person and shakes their hand. Personable people make good leaders, and they are often charismatic, funny, warm, and attentive to others' needs.

What exactly is charisma? The definition of this term is difficult to pinpoint, and it's an overall debatable term. It is commonly thought of as the ability to gain very quickly the attention, respect, and trust of others. Famous leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy are said to have had great charisma. Indubitably, charisma is an extremely effective tool for leaders in certain situations, but it is also difficult to learn.

Humor and warmth are effective in most leadership (and non-leadership!) situations. If you are not fortunate enough to have those traits innately, you can develop them. Start by practicing and broadcasting your lovely smile and laugh!

Having a good memory is another useful characteristic—the ability to remember personal characteristics such as names and facts about the other person’s family, such as how many children he or she has, etc. People like to hear their names. It shows that you recognize them as unique individuals.

2. Persuasive

Communications skills include oral and written skills. You must be able to speak effectively in public and, in most cases, you must have good writing skills also. The old KISS principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid) is timeless in its utility.

Words are often not enough to persuade someone to take a certain action. Most people today attain most of their information from the Internet, TV, and newspapers, all of which use simple styles with plenty of color, pictures, and graphs to convey ideas. Pictures and other visual aids are especially useful in helping people understand abstract ideas and persuading them to see your point of view.

3. Persistent

Keep trying. Most social changes, large and small, develop gradually (and that’s as it should be). Major changes in values and beliefs often take generations to occur and it is unusual for major social changes to occur in less than a few years or even decades. Changes in the educational system often take several decades. If change occurs too fast, people become uncertain about what is right, good, or appropriate. They lose their sense of security. Something as simple as a small change in the curriculum of the local school system may take years. But if the idea is good, the results may last decades and affect many people. Also realize that in a historical perspective, the changes you are working toward may be small

and incremental—just a dot on the map at this moment. Yet great things have small beginnings, too. This means that, yes, what we do may seem insignificant (and may very well be, in the grand scheme of things), but it doesn't have to be (and isn't always)....

Be prepared for an effort lasting several years when you begin the process of bringing about change in your organization or community. *Leadership of major projects will require a large amount of stamina and perseverance.*

4. Patient

There are times when you will need to relax and wait for events or time to pass. Many new ideas will become accepted after people have had time to think about them. Most people who are angry or excited about a proposed change will cool down over time. Patience is a hard attribute for many young people (and not-so-young people) to learn. Most changes, especially if they are worthwhile, do not happen quickly. Patience is an essential trait for leadership, as is self-discipline.

Patience and persistence are essential twins for getting things done. Always remember that leadership and change take time. Patience and persistence are very difficult traits to master, especially for the newer generations who are used to more fast-paced lifestyles, cutting-edge technologies, and rapid-fire updates. Modern culture wants things *now*—not tomorrow. But the real world does not work that way. Some changes will occur slowly.

5. Perceptive

As a leader, you must be sensitive to other people's wants and needs, as well as to changes in those wants and needs. Being perceptive to another person's situation often results in securing that person's trust. A gifted politician is one who can always carefully perceive the current mood of his constituents. The ability to listen is an essential skill of a perceptive leader. You must stay in touch with your supporters. If the group is large or unorganized, this will require more effort.

6. Principled

People who are principled are typically honest and trustworthy, two traits that do and will continue to lead the way and save the day. Most people will believe and follow someone whom they trust. Also, because they have nothing to hide, principled people usually communicate with openness and candor—two characteristics that most people appreciate. There are always a few people who will try to take advantage of such traits, unfortunately—but the vast majority of people will appreciate them.

To be principled, follow the ageless Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

7. Praise-Giving

Almost everyone enjoys recognition, especially if she has worked hard to achieve a certain result. You can't say too many kind words, especially if you speak them in a sincere manner. We're not talking about flattery here; this is about genuine appreciation. If you, as a leader, are working with a committee or team, make absolutely sure that you give everyone public recognition. If you don't, you may find it difficult to garner people's support the next time you need help. It's essential, however, that the praise is deserved and that you are specific about why you are praising someone. Too much praise for too little reason detracts from its value and from your credibility. You can quickly develop a reputation as being overly effusive or insincere if your praise isn't appropriate to the context. One caveat, however: It's important to know people's preferences, as some people prefer to avoid being the center of attention and might actually desire to be recognized for their efforts in private, via e-mail, or in a small group setting. As a general rule, however, *praise in public and criticize in private*.

I cannot emphasize it enough: *It is very important to give people recognition for their contributions*. A self-effacing leader who bestows the credit to his supporters will attract many more followers than one who brags on “my” accomplishments. A simple “thank you” is very effective when sincerely given and meant! On the other hand, one mustn't be loath to accept compliments, either; accept them in the same way you give them: graciously, politely, and genuinely.

8. Positive

A leader should always see the future as bright and optimistic. Tomorrow *will* be even better than today! American sociologist W.I. Thomas wrote many years ago about self-fulfilling prophecies. He said that if a person or group believes a thing to be true and operates as though it were true, often it becomes true through their actions. This has been proven often in education and other fields. If a leader takes a positive stance, it will become more popular, and the desired action is more likely to occur. Always assume that someone will closely examine your stance on almost anything you say or do. Pessimism breeds negativity. Optimism breeds opportunity.

9. People-Oriented

Leadership must be of, by, and for the people. The only reason for leadership should be to benefit people. A common tendency is to look for the benefits to an individual, not to the larger group. One reason why many so-called leaders are distrusted today is because they are seen as self-serving, primarily interested in their own benefits. Many people see politics today as a “good old boys’ club,” with the main players receiving high salaries and super-plush benefits, not at all like the citizen–legislators the founding fathers had in mind. Harry S. Truman summed it up well when he said, “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

10. Possibility-Minded

A leader must be realistic when determining what is actually possible. How much can realistically be accomplished within the time and with the resources available? How strong is the desire for change? Determining which ideas in any organization or setting are politically and economically feasible and which are not is a key characteristic of any leader. Do not jump into solving a problem until you have given very careful consideration to defining the problem. Will other people support the proposed solution? A little caution is a good asset for

a leader. Bold and swift action by the knight on the white horse occurs primarily in the movies. An old folk saying has considerable wisdom for leadership: “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” That doesn’t mean, however, that you shouldn’t take risks. Imagination, daring, and the art of the possible are the hallmarks of leadership. The British Special Air Service motto of “Who Dares Wins” is worth keeping in mind when you are trying to decide on a course of action. Just make sure that you are realistic.

11. Practical

A leader must realize that pleasing all of the people all of the time is not possible. You must be practical when making decisions that cater to the majority, perceptive enough to realize when the majority is right, and strong enough to take action without the support of the majority when the majority is wrong. At the same time, you must be strong enough to stand by your convictions and accept the criticisms—valid and invalid—that are sure to come. ‘Practical’ and ‘possible’ are twins that are considerably interrelated.

12. Progressive

An effective leader is a visionary who will move the group forward. Incorporating new ideas, strategies, and concepts of leadership and communication into your personal style is a perpetual function of leadership. Sometimes progress may mean maintaining the current situation, but mostly it involves moving the group (and yourself) further forward.

13. Prepared

A leader must be knowledgeable about her goals, the means for reaching them, and the tools necessary to meet them, as well as about the people in the group. An effective leader must be both organized and prepared. Many a leader has

opened their mouth and inserted their foot, only to suddenly find that they was no longer regarded as a leader. In my early days as a junior leader, it sometimes felt that I opened my mouth only to change feet. Get used to making mistakes. Be prepared to admit your errors, apologize, learn from them, and move on with good humor.

14. Power-Building

Even the best leaders can't tackle most leadership jobs alone. They need to have followers and know how to motivate these people to willingly become involved to get the job done. *Power* in this context is more about influence, mutual support, and establishing effective alliances. Colleagues (both leaders and followers) need to trust each other if they are to accomplish something successfully; in turn, leaders must be able to delegate from a position of mutual trust. A correlating trait is the ability to network—to build linkages of friends and acquaintances who may be able to provide needed assistance at some future time. A classic study by James Coleman many years ago showed that *who you know* is one of the most important factors that influences life success.

Close examination of the above traits shows that all of them can be nurtured, learned, and developed. Some are learned early in childhood, while others are learned later on. However, the average person can make major improvements in any of these areas. Personally, I know that many of my characteristics have changed greatly since my early years. If I were the same person as I was then, I could not begin to do what I do today. *Changes in personality are very possible, but only you can make the change for yourself. The very first step is to want to do it.*

Characteristics of Admired Leaders

A survey of 15,000 managers worldwide

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Honest 87% | 11. Dependable 32% |
| 2. Forward-looking 71% | 12. Cooperative 30% |
| 3. Inspiring 68% | 13. Imaginative 28% |
| 4. Competent 58% | 14. Caring 27% |
| 5. Fair-minded 49% | 15. Mature 14% |
| 6. Supportive 46% | 16. Determined 13% |
| 7. Broad-minded 41% | 17. Ambitious 10% |
| 8. Intelligent 38% | 18. Loyal 10% |
| 9. Straightforward 34% | 19. Self-controlled 5% |
| 10. Courageous 33% | 20. Independent 5% |

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, "What People Surveyed Feel Are the Most Important Traits of Leaders," in *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*. (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993), 14.

A survey of 75,000 people in 2002 by the same authors found that little had changed over the ensuing nine years. Four characteristics in this survey received more than 50 percent of the votes:

- **Honest**—If people are to follow someone willingly, they first want to assure themselves that their leader is worthy of their trust. The vast majority

of people want to know that the person who is leading them is honest, ethical, and principled.

- **Forward-looking**—People expect leaders to enunciate a clear vision of a future that is worth striving for. Whether this ability is called a vision, dream, a calling, a goal, or a personal agenda, you need to know where you want to be before you can expect others to join the journey willingly.
- **Competent**—We all need to believe that the person who is leading us is competent to do so. You must be demonstrably competent, capable, and effective if you are to bring out the best in others and enable them to act.
- **Inspiring**—Leaders are expected to be enthusiastic, energetic, and positive about the future. Inspiring leadership speaks to our need to have meaning and purpose in our lives. Optimism about the future is the essence of being able to breathe life into our dreams and aspirations.

Other qualities the survey respondents admired included intelligence, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, supportiveness, straightforwardness, dependability, cooperation, and determination.

If this list sounds far too daunting, then perhaps leadership isn't for you. If it sounds challenging but doable, then congratulations, you're on the right path! Leadership is always challenging. And one thing that will help you, above all other characteristics, is to simply stay in good humor and not take yourself too seriously. *A good sense of humor can be a wonderful tool in leadership!*