



Leadership Concepts Series – 2010

**** Common-Sense Guidelines for Successful Organizations ****

Leadership Concept #3

Characteristics of Successful Leaders

And some other traits that are often confused with those characteristics

When people talk about leaders and leadership, they often feel compelled to document distinguishing leadership traits. It's sort of a *Cosmo* thing. Make a list of key characteristics or, better yet, create a quiz:

In a restaurant, I ordered coleslaw and get fries instead, what do I do?

- a. Get mad and demand it be fixed;
- b. Accept the mistake and eat the fries without complaining;
- c. Mumble and grumble but walk away;
- d. Politely but firmly ask the server to rectify the mistake.

Which one do you think you get the most points for? (My, *that* was difficult.)

Beyond the obvious entertainment value of comparing yourself to the “ideal,” there are a few good reasons to understand the traits and capabilities of a good leader. You may need to hire someone for a leadership role. You may be challenged in a leadership role yourself. You may have a boss that is struggling and you are trying to figure out why. It can come in handy to be aware of the common stumbling areas.

One of the problems you see a lot, though, is the tendency to mix up leadership characteristics, general effectiveness characteristics, and leadership skills. Characteristics are part of the make-up of the individual. These are usually born in the person although they can be developed and refined. Skills define a thing you are able to do. Honesty is a characteristic. Defining a vision is a skill.

In this Leadership Concept, we will discuss the characteristics of leadership. In our next Concept, we will discuss leadership skills.

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Characteristics of Successful Leaders

And some other traits that are often confused with those characteristics

Active
Management Pillar
Applicability



Remember: *Leadership is defined by the led*

Therefore, leadership characteristics are highly dependent on perception of the characteristic, as opposed to it being buried deep inside the “real you.” Consistently displaying these traits is like depositing money in the bank. It gives you an account of dependable credibility to draw on when you need to make tough and unpopular decisions, or decisions for which the value isn’t immediately apparent.

Leadership Characteristics

Excellent leaders will display a majority of the following traits:

Confidence: Leaders have confidence in their ability to make things happen. They display confidence in themselves and their organization. They rely on their abilities and the abilities of their staff to do what needs to be done. It really doesn’t matter if they know at this moment *how* it will happen; they are simply comfortable they *can* make it happen.

Strength: Good leaders display strength and backbone in their dealings. They are accountable for tough decisions and they don’t shy away from dealing with root causes or necessary confrontations. They are visible when times are tough. They don’t disappear into their offices, to board meetings, or community events when they should be with their team.

Need to Succeed: Leaders are driven to succeed. They understand failure, they know it is sometimes unavoidable, but they hate it. They display an internal drive for success that is palpable. It can be felt by those around them.

Trust and Believability: Those around and dependent on the leader must be able to trust in what the leader says and that he or she will live up to their commitments. They must trust and believe their leader can get them where they need to be. A leader cannot be perceived as dissembling. They cannot parse words in order to present a limited picture as a convincing argument. Not to put too fine a point on it, but using a partial truth as cover is *lying*. Lying is a leadership killer. Very important note: Trust and believability (in this context) is not to be confused with honesty or moral integrity.

Purpose: Leaders cannot waffle. They must be perceived as consistently driving to a clear and desirable outcome. Do your actions match your words? Disconnect between actions and words creates distrust and, worse: ridicule.

Pride in Competence: If people are going to follow you, they must feel like you know what you are doing and are capable of pulling it off. They also need to perceive you understand the business you are in.

Other Characteristics Often Confused with Leadership Traits

There are some characteristics that are desirable but not part and parcel of a leader's essence. Leaders can get by quite effectively without one or more of the following. In general, they tend to help, but they are not required:

Listens: Leaders can be self-absorbed, ego-driven maniacs and still be pretty effective. You need go no further than your local political arena find some sterling examples. Again, don't confuse listening with awareness and use of pertinent information. The characteristic of listening to others and getting advice may or may not be part of a leader's personal inventory.

Honesty: Nope. Not necessary as long as those needing to follow you can depend on your follow-through.

Intelligence: High intelligence is a nice to have. Thinking too much or too deeply, however, can actually get in the way of being an effective leader. Purposeful behavior can actually be undermined by too many qualifications:

We will be the number one provider of widgets in 2010. Unless of course there is an earthquake. Or, a power outage. Or or. . .

Waters down the impact a bit, doesn't it?

Next: *The Skills of Effective Leaders*

About Agovia

Agovia Consulting has one aim:

*To facilitate your success
Through management consulting
And management skills development*

We focus on small-to-medium sized organizations. Businesses, nonprofits, schools. We work mostly with organizations that need all the rigor and capability of large businesses but don't have the deep pockets to pay hundreds of thousands a year to consultants. You need to plan. You need to execute. You need to be operationally sound. But you don't need to drill a hole in the bottom of your bank account to do that.

Agovia is your partner in crafting common-sense plans, execution governance, and management practices that are laser-focused and, by design, create your results and your success. We help you solve your problems today and help assure your success tomorrow through management practices built on outcomes, results, and achievement.

Managing to Success

Success requires the alignment and coordination of many factors. Enterprises must be competent, not only in elements of their core mission, they must also have the ability to create and maintain the management infrastructure that surrounds and supports that mission.

What We Do

Agovia is a management consulting firm. It's what we do. Picture us a management fitness coach. We help you develop and strengthen the skills you need to succeed. We have provided consultation and solutions to multiple industries including: Information Technology, Insurance, Universities, and Homeless Services. We bring you the support, advice, and driving facilitation that allow you to stop "planning" and start getting results.

Services

- ❖ **The Rapid Planning System – Tools, Training, Portfolio Management**
- ❖ **Identity Development (Mission & Vision)**
- ❖ **Team Effectiveness Coaching**
- ❖ **Strategic and Tactical Planning**
- ❖ **Planning and Governance Training**
- ❖ **Organization Turn-Around**
- ❖ **Retreat Facilitation**
- ❖ **Runaway Project Services**
- ❖ **Problem Solving – A Cultural Effective Approach**
- ❖ **Conflict Resolution**
- ❖ **Team/Function Start-Up**

Trust yourself

You are the expert in your business. The challenges are often nuts & bolts issues: organization, clear vision, discipline, management infrastructure, and communication. Sometimes you just need a catalyst.

We listen. We pay attention. We work with you.

