



Top Leadership Traits

Three will take you to the top

Today's article comes to you from 35,000 feet somewhere over this great country of ours. I'd like to review three key traits of successful leaders. Whether you're a new manager with a small operation or an experienced veteran with hundreds of advisors that you are accountable for, you need to find a way to develop these capabilities.

The aura you project as a leader — your *leadership demeanour* — can have an incredible effect on your teams. This is particularly important in the military, where strong leadership can have life-and-death consequences. The business world works similarly. How as a leader you carry yourself — how you speak, listen, deal with challenges, and act when you think no one is watching — form the building blocks of your leadership demeanour.

If you have read the book *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott, you may be familiar with the “emotional wake” concept, the aftermath of your comments and actions. You need to understand how your words and actions can leave a much bigger impact (negative or positive) on your team. Your leadership demeanour will extend your reach far beyond your immediate conversations and actions.

One of the best ways to get a fix on your leadership demeanour is to ask members of your team for feedback. Have a coffee with someone who speaks plainly. Ask the question, “What do you think of my leadership actions as of late?” or, “What do you think I should start doing more of or less of as a leader?” After that it's up to you. With feedback in hand, you'll be able to take effective action. Remember: even rockstar leaders have areas where they need to improve.

Another quality I have observed in great leaders inside and outside our industry is the ability to adapt. Adaptability has to be one of the most vital skills a leader can possess, especially in today's fast-paced, always-on business world.

We are living in times of great change, and leaders who are open to new ideas, new ways of thinking, and even new technologies usually emerge as the winners, no matter what the contest. As we all learned in high school, species survive by adapting to the ever-changing environment they are living in. Failure to adapt translates into outcomes faced by the dodo bird, dinosaurs and the woolly mammoth.

THE TAKE-AWAY

Leaders who are open to new ideas, new ways of thinking, and even new technologies usually emerge as the winners. They inspire others to act. They model that behaviour through their own actions and values.


I want you to take a little time to reflect on this next section. Book 30 minutes with yourself, and in that time rate yourself on a scale of one to 10, with one being “I don't do this well” and 10 being “I am a superstar.” Here are the areas in which I want you to rate yourself: “I embrace new ideas, regardless of the source;” “I am always among the first to use new technology;” “I read about how to change my thinking;” “I leverage a network of great thinkers for new ideas;” “I am the first to uncover new market opportunities for my teams.” You get the picture. Once you're finished, have your top advisors and manager peers rate you. Look for big gaps — two points or more — and take action in those areas. You'll see a difference, I know it.

The leader who takes action is the leader who eventually comes out on top. These leaders ask questions such as “so what?” when presented with information or observations. They are always looking at next steps. They want people to do something, not just talk about it. They inspire others to act. They model that behaviour through their own actions and values, and they celebrate the victories. They also learn from their mistakes. They move fast and get things done. For this one, everyone should have a fairly clear idea of what they need to do. The big challenge is not *what* needs to be done, but *when*.

I'd suggest taking advice from Simon Bailey (2014 MDRT), who recommends getting up 15 minutes earlier each day. In those 15 minutes you should be:

- 1) Spending five minutes meditating on the day that is about to unfold. How do you want it to go? What can you do to shape a great day?;
- 2) Reading something positive or inspiring; and
- 3) Stretching and getting your body ready for the amazing day you are about to have.

Do this for seven days and see what a difference it makes.

I know that everyone who is reading this piece is on a journey to becoming a better leader. If you'd like to explore any of these points further, please get in touch with me on LinkedIn. 

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