

Twelve Leadership Traits

by
Phil Rasmussen

For 78 years I have been associated with the US military in one manner or another. I grew up in the Air Force, joined the Navy, switched over to the Army, retired with 30 years of service, and continue to support our military.

Over my lifetime I have observed military leadership including that of our various Commanders-in-Chiefs. At all leadership levels there are poor, good, and exceptional leaders. In my 30-year military career, I have served under only two highly exceptional leaders. This is a sad commentary on the leadership abilities of those who are in leadership positions.

Military and university MBA programs regularly teach courses that teach twelve commonly identified leadership traits.

Creative Leadership	US Army*	Indeed
Self-Awareness	Lead from the front	Ability to Communicate
Respect	Have self-confidence	Courage
Compassion	Moral courage	Integrity
Vision	Physical courage	Discipline
Communication	Foster teamwork	Fairness
Learning Agility	Have fitness and energy	Unselfishness
Collaboration	Be aggressive and bold	Dependability
Influence	Take care of your soldiers	Vision
Integrity	Be a student of the past	Assertiveness
Courage	Be decisive	Professional Competence
Gratitude	Show determination	Judgment
Resilience	Be strong of character	Creativity

* Army FM 6-22 Developing Leaders (<https://cal.army.mil/Resource-Library/Doctrine/fm-6-22/>)

Although the Army's leadership program is excels when compared to other such programs, the major problem with most of the programs is that they do not discuss how the traits interact between the leader and those lead. True leadership is the empowerment of those who follow a leader.

1. Leaders are generous with information

Most people horde information and are unwilling to share it with others. They like to keep things to themselves and treat their job with secrecy. Leaders on the other hand openly communicate their knowledge and whatever information that may be useful to their employees and others.

- 2. Leaders communicate permission**
In the same spirit that leaders give out as much information as possible, they establish an open door policy that effectively allows employees to bring up issues that are sensitive to them, and where they can speak frankly, privately, safely, and confidentially.
- 3. Leaders stimulate openness**
If there is no fear of embarrassment, putdowns, retaliation, etc., people will be open. To stimulate openness, leaders must set a good example by being open themselves. People tend to trust leaders when they listen respectfully and let them talk without interruption.
- 4. Leaders motivate**
People need to be led in a variety of ways. Some need to be coached with ideas. Others need support for their own efforts. And others will need to be directed. In every case, encouragement and celebration of success complements leadership.
- 5. Leaders put the right people in the right jobs**
If people are doing work that is uncomfortable for them, even if they have the skills, they are tense and inefficient. For example, idea-oriented people who thrive on tossing out ideas should not be in jobs that confine them to close attention to detail. Over the long run, a poor fit between person and job is toxic for the individual and for the organization
- 6. Leaders don't treat everyone the same.**
They find each person's unique qualities, be it their generation, personal situation, emotional make-up, competencies, or weaknesses. For example, the Nexus Generation -those under 30-tend to react poorly to a boss. They want a coach, lots of opportunity, and informal feedback. Baby Boomers, on the other hand, can typically work with a minimum of feedback and react better to structure.
- 7. Leaders celebrate success**
Leaders make work fun. This energizes people, keeping them motivated. A leader interested in his/her employees will constantly be on the lookout for things to celebrate. Leaders experience joy or pride in their work and extend these emotions to everyone in the workplace. Celebrate team wins with team events. Individual accomplishments should be recognized verbally and through whatever compensation or other means appropriate to the situation and the individual. Personal accomplishments should get public recognition.
- 8. Leaders model standards and boundaries**
Leaders lead by example. They follow the same standards and boundaries that they expect of their employees and that are outlined in policy and procedures manuals. They make sure that their employees work

appropriately and do not set unreasonable deadlines, standards, demands, etc.

9. Leaders are mentors

Mentors are actively involved and responsible in creating, planning, and teaching the concepts of leadership to others. In essence, a good leader will develop employees that can move up the organizational ladder and eventually take their place. Leaders will grow the next generation of leaders through the support of initiatives people can benefit from, and support of employee efforts with encouragement and reinforcement.

10. Leaders are friendly and calm

Being a manager does not necessarily make a person a leader. The styles listed above require a leader to exhibit appropriate friendliness if they are to be utilized. Over management of employees does not create an atmosphere of friendliness. In fact, quite the opposite. Too often people in management positions exhibit friendliness in one direction only, i.e. to those who can help them accomplish their personal agendas. Friendliness is a 360 degree attribute. Leaders will be friendly with all employees from the lowest person in the pecking order to the highest. A friendly leader is one who cares, is considerate, empowers others, and is concerned for all of his/her employees. The easiest way to be friendly is to talk to people about their favorite topic-themselves.

Calmness comes from being self assured, friendly, and from planning. A leader, having these traits coupled with quality planning will remain calm in times of adversity, upset, emergencies, etc. Calmness in these situations is contagious and with it the leader will bring his employees through whatever troubled times there are and move forward. Do not confuse a lack of indifference with calmness. The two are very different and leaders do not exhibit indifference.

11. Leaders are available

Most managers will proclaim they have an open-door policy when in effect it is not. To have an open door policy means information must flow freely out of that open door before it can flow into that open door. Leaders who want to have open dialogue with their employees view sharing information as an opportunity rather than a burden. They will make themselves available to their employees. This is usually done by getting out of the office and fostering open dialogue, especially on important issues. It is important for leaders to ask how open dialogue can be fostered; not shoot the messengers of bad news; and to follow up to assure understanding and comprehension. Open door policies have less to do with the physical nature of an office entrance and more to do with attitude and approachability by anyone in the workplace.

12. **Leaders are courageous**

One of the toughest aspects of being a leader, is having to make tough choices. These choices are not based on personal desires and agendas but rather on organizational goals and objectives. Often it takes courage to say no to the workplace.

Who Will You Choose As Your Nation's Leader?