

LEADERSHIP

= A Competitive Advantage

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What is leadership? Leadership definitions are as numerous as the number of leaders. These definitions are developed from our own individual experiences. As a way of introduction, some of my leadership experiences include a nursery manager as a junior in High School, a U.S. Navy ensign to a Navy captain, a university professor in charge of several projects and programs, a container nursery manager, a container nursery owner and an owner of a nursery consulting company. Thus, my definition of leadership is wide and varied. Write down your leadership experiences to see what constitutes your definition of leadership and how your definition aligns with, and helps you do what you are doing today.

In addition to our individual definitions and quality of leadership, an article titled "Make Yourself a Leader" provides some key leadership characteristics from which we can all improve our own leadership ability, as well as the leadership capability of each leader in our companies. The author of these characteristics is unknown, but they were published in a journal called *Fast Company*, which refers to itself as a "Handbook of Business Revolution." Please read and study the following:

12 Characteristics of Leadership

1. Leaders are both confident and modest. You need a healthy ego to lead, but you also need to be strong enough to check it at the door. Being a leader is not about making yourself more powerful.

It's about making the people around you more powerful.

2. Leaders are authentic. You earn the trust and respect of the people you work with when you know who you are, and when you walk your talk. Who believes in leaders who do not believe in themselves?

3. Leaders are listeners. Great listening is fueled by curiosity. It is hard to be a great listener if you are not curious about other people.

4. Leaders are good at giving encouragement, and they are never satisfied. Leaders are always raising the stakes of the game for themselves and for their people. They are always testing and building both courage and stamina throughout the organization.

5. Leaders make unexpected connections. They organize and lead conversations among people who do not normally interact with each other. They see the kinds of patterns that allow for small innovations and breakthrough ideas.

6. Leaders provide direction. No single leader is smart enough to know everything, but smart leaders do know how to pose revealing questions.

7. Leaders protect their people from danger and expose them to reality. Most people want leaders to insulate them from change rather than mobilize them to face it. That is why leadership is so dangerous.

8. Leaders make changes and stand for values that do not change. One job of the leader is to help people identify what habits and assumptions must be changed for the company to prosper. And then ask "Which values and operations are so central to our core that if we lose them, we

lose ourselves?"

9. Leaders lead by example. Small gestures can send big messages. Leaders have a fundamental obligation to live their lives according to the principles they espouse. Remember, you are always under a microscope.

10. Leaders do not blame, they learn. Even the smartest business people make mistakes. Bill Gates once decided that the Internet would not have a big impact on Microsoft's business. These days, the right mind-set is an experimental mind-set: Try, Fail, Learn, Try Again.

11. Leaders look for, and network with other leaders. Want to make yourself even more effective as a leader? Want to heighten your influence and deepen your impact? Stop playing the role of the Lone Ranger! Look for allies, network with like-minded colleagues and help those people become better leaders. After all, it is lonely at the top only if you place yourself on a pedestal.

12. The job of a leader: Make more leaders. Look around you. Do you see enough leaders at all levels to keep your company changing and charging into the future? The team with the most and the best leaders wins! Your ultimate task is not just to be a leader, it is to make more leaders!

I hope these characteristics will encourage you to think about what leadership means to you, what it is for you and what it does for you. May they bring new perspectives of leadership into your own definitions and into your company. You cannot survive without good leadership!



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