

Would you Follow you? 5 Characteristics of Leadership

Written by: Drew Koch, CM | September 7, 2017



No, I am not talking about Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram here. What I am asking is, if a leader had your identical leadership characteristics, would you follow him or her, or not? Answering this question honestly is of paramount importance if we want to be great leaders.

A leader inspires others to work together to achieve a common goal. If you are not giving your followers the kind of leadership they deserve, achieving common goals is going to be difficult.

How can you possibly know what followers want in a leader? Fortunately, in their classic book [The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations](#), Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner identified five leadership traits that are most important to followers, based on the percentage of survey respondents who identified them as important.

A Leader Should be...

1. Intelligent (47%)

Given a choice, who wants to follow a person who isn't intelligent? Many of us have done so in our careers, but probably not for very long. We want and need leaders to be intelligent so they can understand problems and opportunities while making good decisions that will benefit our organizations and ourselves. Even so, intelligence itself is not enough, and other traits are more important by far, such as...

2. Inspiring (65%)

The best leaders have the ability to articulate their vision in a way that inspires and motivates others. When followers accept the leader's vision as the best way forward for them and the organization, they will be highly motivated to achieve that vision. All of the most successful presidents, world leaders, military leaders, and coaches have had this trait. However, three traits are actually more important...

3. Competent (66%)

Who wouldn't want a leader or manager to have the skills and abilities to do their job well? That is what the [Certified Manager \(CM\) certification](#) is all about - verifying that a manager has what it takes to be successful. Organizations with incompetent leaders ultimately fail, usually with dire consequences. Given this fact, it is hard to imagine how any other traits are more important, but it turns out there actually are two. One of which is...

4. Forward-looking (71%)

It is actually pretty easy to understand what customers want right now. You can always ask them, or judge from your organization's performance versus your competitors. The best leaders are able to go one-step forward and visualize what customers will want and need in the future. By doing so, they are able to steer their organizations on a course that meets those needs and yields sustained success.

Forward-thinkers also convey the impression that their company's products and services are cutting-edge and designed to make their customers' lives easier and more enjoyable. Most if not all of the most successful companies have leaders with this trait, including [Apple](#), [Google](#), [Amazon](#), and [Tesla](#).

Even so, one more thing is still more important...

5. Honest (88%)

There you have it. Above all else, people want leaders who tell the truth. When you think about it, how can you possibly follow someone if you can't trust their word or promises? In uncertain times, workers need to know their leaders tell the truth when talking about how their organization is doing and what the future holds. Otherwise, employees develop distrust from not knowing where they stand.

If you possess these five characteristics, your followers are most likely happy and productive. Even if you don't, it is never too late to change, and there is no time like the present to start.

Source: The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations, 6th Edition, by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner

About the Author



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ICPM Senior Director Drew Koch joined the staff in May 1998, after earning Master of Arts and Educational Specialist degrees from James Madison University. Drew is responsible for new business development, financial operations, staffing and leadership of the Institute. He also supervises ICPM's day-to-day operations and is responsible for exam development, question writing and review, exam security, and statistical analysis.

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