

Attributes of Leadership

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It is often that we hear management and leadership as a synonymous term. They are not, yet they are related in the sense of accomplishing a common goal with people. Leadership is defined (according Webster) as guiding; directing head; position or function or an act or instance of leading; guidance or direction. Management conveys the idea that something is done or completed. To bring to fruition or to accomplish.

Now we may “manage” people to perform a task or complete a job, but to “lead” is to focus more directly on the people performing the task or job which is secondary in this sense. A leader will gain respect due to the person they are (rather than the position they hold) and the ideals and integrity they hold or their demeanor or the motivation they pass on.

A leader may be a good manager but a manager is not always a good leader. Have you ever heard something like “yup, Hank is a heck of a superintendent. He sure doesn’t miss much and always comes through for us. Funny thing though, we have a hard time keeping people here for more than a year at a time. Must be that these youngsters just don’t have the work ethics or stick-to-itiveness that we used to have back in the good ‘ole days.” It is easy to blame our short-comings upon others and say “because I’m the boss is why”. At times a lack of respect for authority can play in, but many times a boss looks at tasks and fails to take a serious look at the leadership side and how or if THEY are operating as a leader.

I have thought about leadership attributes and the complexity of leadership much over the years and have read and attended various classes as many of you have. I have often wondered how some can so easily place leadership in a definitive box and explain it in a short class; do this and you are a leader and you can pick up your certificate on the way out the door. We can learn much from observing others, being instructed over time while on-the-job by a person with good leadership qualities, read books and attend classes and I still say with all of this, it takes a lifetime of practice and application and a whole lot of patience and listening

to scratch the surface of being a good leader. This is especially true when we cut through the chase and obtain the opinions that subordinates hold or see it in their performance or lack of.

If you are in a leadership role, are you a leader in the eyes of those you are to be leading? Does your staff/crew respect you, care for you and know what you would want done in your absence? Do they sincerely try to please you and make you proud of them? Is there consistency in the team as a whole that reflects the ability of the leader? Can you motivate them and do they trust you? These questions are not to say that this is bottom line showing a leader’s ability. Other things also play into the performance and contentment of staff/crew such as decisions that may not be popular or the lack of understanding the big picture, salary, or the fact that the supervisor/leader may answer to someone else and they are just trying to do their job and know all along that what they must carry out may not sit well with their staff.

The following is from a paper that I was given some time ago. I cannot find who wrote or compiled it but it is worth looking at.

The Attributes of Leadership – It has been determined that one must possess at least four of the following thirteen attributes to be considered a leader. The more qualities you possess, the stronger your leadership ability.

1. Determination – leaders are strong willed. They face up to opposition and overcome it.
2. Ambition – leaders are driven to achieve goals and they are willing to work long and hard to do so.
3. Quick Intelligence – leaders think rapidly. They can analyze situations and alter plans accordingly.
4. Dependability – leaders are consistent and reliable.
5. Communication – leaders are able to communicate ideas to others.

6. Courage – leaders are willing to take risks.
7. Knowledge – a leader knows his or her organization and its practices.
8. Vision – leaders look ahead, predict what will happen and plan for it.
9. Integrity – leaders have strong ethical values, strength of character and self discipline.
10. Decisiveness – leaders are able to make decisions and follow through on them.
11. Emotional Maturity – leaders are comfortable with themselves and accept their own faults and abilities. They are predictable and dependable.
12. Independence – leaders are free thinkers. They are not afraid to disagree with the majority. They question and are willing to change policies and procedures.
13. Judgment – leaders form opinions and make decisions objectively and wisely. Their opinions and decisions reflect the goals of the organization and society in general.

This is a great list to reflect upon and if I could add one more it would be something along the lines of: Importance – serving your boss or board and carrying out their policies and plans and yet while doing so, operating and performing your duties and job in such a way that it is evident to your subordinates that you hold their importance higher than your own. Action speaks louder than words! The leader or boss is only as good as their people and the people working for the boss are only as good as he or she will allow them to be. I read a comment once that a supervisor should hire the best possible people they can, then get out of their way and let them do their work! Best wishes.