The Art of Great Leadership: What is leadership and how is it defined?

Countless books, training sessions, conferences, and keynote speakers have addressed the topic of “leadership.” Dwight D. Eisenhower explained it this way:

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”

If you take that definition at face value, leadership is an art - meaning it can be very subjective. It also involves some level of persuasion and causing another person to act in a desired manner. Leadership incorporates an “inspirational” aspect or a sharing of one’s vision that compels or motivates another person to act.

Leadership differs from management in that there is a willingness on the part of the person being led to want to follow. Management is more of a process of following pre-established rules or guidelines. It is quite possible to be a good manager, but not a good leader.
HERE ARE A FEW TRAITS WE FIND NECESSARY IN GREAT LEADERS:

**Accountability** – Takes responsibility when things go wrong. This seems counter-intuitive to today’s “leaders,” particularly in the political spectrum. However, there is a certain sense of trust that is gained when someone openly acknowledges a mistake and addresses it. Accountability leads to trust.

**Gives credit to others when things go right** – Nothing is more demoralizing than when your supervisor or manager takes your idea and claims it as their own without giving you credit. It creates resentment in the ranks and could lead to low morale and higher turnover. Conversely, when you acknowledge the important contributions of your employees, it generates pride in their work and a sense of loyalty to the organization. Sharing credit leads to loyalty.

**Confidence, not arrogance** – This is a fine line, as we all want our leaders to be capable and competent in their area of work. But prideful boasting and arrogance leads to a weakened team. Proverbs 16:18 pride leads to destruction, and arrogance leads to downfall.

**Authentic** – Most people have a built-in sense to determine when someone is being authentic. The best advice is to be yourself and don’t try to fool others. Being inauthentic leads to others questioning your integrity and your commitment to the cause. Authenticity leads to credibility.

**Decisiveness** – It is more important to make the right decision than the popular one. It is also important to stick to your word. People may disagree with your decisions, but if your decisions are based on what is best for the organization, employees will grow to respect your decision-making ability.

**Strong Communication Skills** – It is certainly important to have a vision and to be confident in your decisions. However, if you are unable to communicate these visions and decisions to others, it will be impossible to lead them.

**Passionate for the Mission** – Often leadership means being able to tell your story in a compelling manner to inspire others to act how you want them to act. If that is done in a bland, monotone manner, it could diminish the sense of urgency or importance of the message. Being passionate about the mission gets the attention and respect of your employees. It lets them know that you are serious and committed to the cause at hand.

**Lead by example** – If you are about to embark on a vision that requires everyone moving in the same direction, make sure employees see you actually moving in that direction. Nothing will undermine your efforts more than the perception of hypocrisy or that the leader doesn’t really care about the cause. When you can gain a sense of trust, respect, and loyalty among your co-workers, you are well on the path towards becoming a great leader!
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