10 CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT LEADERS

While it’s commonly argued whether great leaders are born or made, there’s little doubt that great leaders share several characteristics. Leadership skills are among the most important to develop if you wish to advance your career. You’ll find that you already possess some of these qualities and likely need to develop the others. Anyone can be a leader; you don’t need a title.

Great leaders share these qualities:

1. Lead by example. Great leaders know that they can get the best out of others by setting a good example. They understand how to walk the walk and talk the talk. If you want your followers to be committed, positive, passionate, and involved, demonstrate those characteristics each day. Ask yourself what are you currently communicating to others by the example you set?

   “If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then, you are an excellent leader.” - Dolly Parton

2. Take responsibility. Irresponsible leaders look to shift the blame when things start to go wrong. They understand they need to take the blame, even if they aren’t at fault. A great leader, however, knows that setbacks occur. She also knows that if failure occurs, it was her poor planning, vision, effort, or leadership that resulted in the poor results. Everything rises and falls on leadership.

   “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”
   - Abraham Lincoln

3. Vision. To lead effectively, a great leader must know where she’s headed. After all, you must lead to a specific destination. You can’t have followers and you don’t know where to guide them. Do you have a vision for the future and can you communicate that vision to others? What is your why? Is your vision clear and easy to understand? Is your vision focused? Do you know where you’re going? They know their strengths and for their weaknesses they surround themselves with people are great at their weakness

   “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.” - Simon Sinek

4. A plan. You might know where you’re going, but do you know how to get there? Great leaders understand they don’t know it all, so they have a great team of people who can develop a plan of action and implement it.

   “It takes as much energy to wish as it does to plan.”
   Eleanor Roosevelt, former first lady of the United States
5. Great communication skills. The ability to share your vision and your plan are paramount to success. Great leaders are excellent communicators and work to enhance their communication skills further. They are transparent and not afraid to share the details.

“The difference between leadership and management is leadership.” – Winston Churchill

6. Lifelong learners. Great leaders understand they have not arrived because they have a title. Great leaders understand that continuously learning is essential for their growth and others. They are always seeking ways to develop their skills and personal development.

“The ability to learn is the most important quality a leader can have.” - Sheryl Sandberg

7. Know how to develop others. It’s important to develop others to become better leaders. A great leader takes the time to develop the skills of her followers. The more capable your followers, the more impressive the results you’ll ultimately attain. If a leader is alone at the top, they are not a great leader.

“A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go but ought to be.”- Rosalynn Carter

8. They authentically care about people. Great leaders genuinely care about the well-being of others. They consistently think of the needs of others. They understand a simple “hello,” can change the course of someone’s day.

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” - Maya Angelou

9. Integrity. Team members have to believe and trust in their leader. Can your team believe what you say? Do your team members trust that you’re fully committed to the project and to them? Without integrity, no one will trust you enough to commit and engage with your plans. Remember integrity is what you do when no one is looking, when you are alone, are you the same person?

“Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did it or not.” - Oprah Winfrey

10. Can deal with chaos. Chaos is inevitable, it is going to happen. Team members have personal issues. There’s always someone disgruntled. Plans change. The objective can change. A great leader knows how to calmly and purposefully deal with the unexpected and guide others through the resulting distractions. They always have a plan, and if they don’t they know how to gather a team and create one.

“It is all about finding the calm in the chaos.” - Donna Karen
Bonus: Self-Awareness. A great leader is aware of their faults and areas of growth and development. They know who they are and they aren’t missing anything in life.

They know what bugs them and what makes them happy, they also know how to manage their emotions as needed.

“I think self-awareness is probably the most important thing towards being a champion.” - Billie Jean King

How many of these 10 characteristics do you possess? Are you willing to develop those qualities that you lack? Great leaders have several qualities in common that you can learn and apply to enhance your leadership skills. The great news is all these characteristics can be developed.

Review these qualities and look for ways to further develop your leadership abilities.