

Leadership is a choice not a position. Please don't confuse the two, as many of us so easily can. A title next to his/her name doesn't qualify him/her as a leader. In researching Leadership I found that there are four major characteristics that people look for in Leaders. They came to me in a content-rich book [The Leadership Challenge](#). The two authors conducted a survey over six continents: North America, South America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Australia. A majority of the data came from the United States. Kouzes and Posner asked people, "What values do you look for and admire in your leader?" The top four in correct sequence were Honesty, Forward Looking, Competence, and Inspiration.

Honesty, wow! How many of the leaders in country are honest? It almost seems like an oxymoron linking honest and politician in the same sentence. This should be clear to our leaders that people want them to be straightforward. Honesty can also be tied in with Integrity, Character, and most importantly, a set of values on how one decides to live his/her life. Honesty in our leaders is crucial because we are a society that teaches "perfection". It is great to strive for perfection and being the best in one's chosen field. But it is another aspect to not admit our faults or accept responsibility for our actions. Our greatest growth spurts come from mistakes. These can be seen as "growing pains". Often it is a tough situation but we come out stronger. Two of our most admired leaders are Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., people who contained a set of values and were honest. *"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom."* Thomas Jefferson

Being honest as a leader will earn you the respect of your team, but having the vision is what will keep you there. The second quality that Kouzes and Posner found was **Forward Looking**. You don't have to have the ability to see the future or some grand vision, but you do have to select the destination at which your team should arrive and is

responsible that the focus and discipline are directed toward that path. Earl Nightingale said it best, *“A goal is a general progression towards a worthy ideal.”* Having the ability to see what you want to accomplish in six months to a year is crucial to leading a group of individuals. Society has conditioned us to see as far in advance as our weekend plans. Leaders have the ability to keep the team on track and aiming for a target.

The third quality of an admired leader is **competence**. Being competent can be an attribute associated with many positions. But with Leadership it means having the ability to carry out tasks and having a good track record to prove it. Leaders do not need to know how to perform every skill in their organization; however, they do need to know who performs them the best, and have great advisors in those areas. Leadership competency also involves working well with people. The days of the autocratic military leadership style are no longer. There used to be a time in this country when three hundred presidents of the top fortune five hundred companies had a military background. Studies are showing that there is a difference in leading different types of generations. Listening is more than 80% of great communication and often a skill that is overlooked. Getting a group of individuals to come together as a team and share in the vision is what being a competent leader is all about.

Can you motivate your people? I believe the answer is no. Motivation comes from within. However, great leaders usually have the ability to inspire people, which lead us to our last quality **Inspiration**. It is not enough to tell your staff the vision, and expect them to jump on board. You have to show them true enthusiasm. Attitudes and Emotions are contagious. In sports often times the team adopts the philosophy of its head coach. The same can be looked at in business. As the leader you are responsible for the morale of the team. When enthusiasm and passion start to waiver, teams quickly loose sight of the goal. Inspiring leaders are able to show people the connection and impact that their work has on the company. We are finding today's employees want praise, acceptance and

belonging, compassion, and job security. This is why being able to inspire people is such a critical aspect of being a great leader.

Test the Leadership of your Organization

If you want to put your top leaders to the test get everyone involved in a community service activity. You could have them involved in anything and assign them positions at random. Then sit back and see if your “leaders” within the company are able to lead individuals whom they have never met and have no control over. Also observe and see whom the participants gravitate towards.

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