

Traits of Successful Leaders

Building a thriving small business requires leadership. However, the majority of people are not born leaders. Instead, circumstances and persistence are major factors in developing any leader. If your goal is to become a successful leader, work on developing those areas of your personality that need strengthening.

Raymond Cattell, a pioneer in the field of personality assessment, developed the Leadership Potential equation in 1954. This equation, which was based on a study of military leaders, is used today to determine the traits which characterize an effective leader. The traits of an effective leader include the following:

- **Emotional stability.** Good leaders must be able to tolerate frustration and stress. Overall, they must be well-adjusted and have the psychological maturity to deal with anything they are required to face.
- **Dominance.** Leaders are often times competitive and decisive and usually enjoy overcoming obstacles. Overall, they are assertive in their thinking style as well as their attitude in dealing with others.
- **Enthusiasm.** Leaders are usually seen as active, expressive, and energetic. They are often very optimistic and open to change. Overall, they are generally quick and alert and tend to be uninhibited.
- **Conscientiousness.** Leaders are often dominated by a sense of duty and tend to be very exacting in character. They usually have a very high standard of excellence and an inward desire to do one's best. They also have a need for order and tend to be very self-disciplined.
- **Social boldness.** Leaders tend to be spontaneous risk-takers. They are usually socially aggressive and generally thick-skinned. Overall, they are responsive to others and tend to be high in emotional stamina.
- **Toughmindedness.** Good leaders are practical, logical, and to-the-point. They tend to be low in sentimental attachments and comfortable with criticism. They are usually insensitive to hardship and overall, are very poised.
- **Self-assurance.** Self-confidence and resiliency are common traits among leaders. They tend to be free of guilt and have little or no need for approval. They are generally secure and free from guilt and are usually unaffected by prior mistakes or failures.
- **Compulsiveness.** Leaders were found to be controlled and very precise in their social interactions. Overall, they were very protective of their integrity and reputation and consequently tended to be socially aware and careful, abundant in foresight, and very careful when making decisions or determining specific actions.

Beyond these basic traits, leaders of today must also possess traits which will help them motivate others and lead them in new directions. Leaders of the future must be able to envision the future and convince others that their vision is worth following. To do this, they must have the following personality traits:

- **High energy.** Long hours and some travel are usually a prerequisite for leadership positions, especially as your company grows. Remaining alert and staying focused are two of the greatest obstacles you will have to face as a leader.
- **Intuitiveness.** Rapid changes in the world today combined with information overload result in an inability to "know" everything. In other words, reasoning and logic will not get you through all situations. In fact, more and more leaders are learning to the value of using their intuition and trusting their "gut" when making decisions.
- **Maturity.** To be a good leader, personal power and recognition must be secondary to the development of your employees. In other words, maturity is based on recognizing that more can be accomplished by empowering others than can be by ruling others.
- **Team orientation.** Business leaders today put a strong emphasis on team work. Instead of promoting an adult/child relationship with their employees, leaders create an adult/adult relationship which fosters team cohesiveness.
- **Empathy.** Being able to "put yourself in the other person's shoes" is a key trait of leaders today. Without empathy, you can't build trust. And without trust, you will never be able to get the best effort from your employees.
- **Charisma.** People usually perceive leaders as larger than life. Charisma plays a large part in this perception. Leaders who have charisma are able to arouse strong emotions in their employees by defining a vision which unites and captivates them. Using this vision, leaders motivate employees to reach toward a future goal by tying the goal to substantial personal rewards and values.

Overall, leaders are larger than life in many ways. Personal traits play a major role in determining who will and who will not be comfortable leading others. It's important to remember that people are forever learning and changing. You, too, can become a leader if you set your mind to it.