

## LEADERS: BORN OR MADE?

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There's an old, poignant adage that goes something like this: "It's more difficult to move a wet strand of spaghetti across a slippery surface by pushing it from the rear than it is if you pull it from the front." The same simple analogy applies when it comes to leadership.

Learning to be an effective and sustained leader remains one of the more paramount issues facing both entrepreneurs as they build their organizations, as well as those executives and managers who perceive themselves on the way up or at the top of their careers. There have been a plethora of books outlining the Teddy Roosevelt style (walk softly but carry a big stick), the 60's style (make everybody feel comfy), and other often-tried management styles as well. Unfortunately, most leadership operating styles avoid the real issue - leadership.

Whether one believes in the "leaders-are-born" theory or "leaders-are-made" philosophy is secondary. History has proven that true leaders have several major traits in common and characteristics that always need fine-tuning:

- Leaders are goal-oriented.
- Leaders are pragmatic.
- Leaders are energetic.
- Leaders are courageous.
- Leaders are honest (almost always.)
- Leaders are enthusiastic.
- Leaders are lifelong learners.
- Leaders are charismatic (sometimes.)
- Leaders are inspirational.
- Most of all, leaders are winners.

But it's tough to be a leader unless someone has somewhere to lead. Also, the true leader must take a level-headed, long-term view of issues while learning from the past and planning effectively to learn from such mistakes. The leader who possesses a high level of energy is ordinarily an individual who can sustain a 50, 60 or more hour work week and accept it as a way of life. Let's face it, the 9-to-5er may well be extinct as a success story. Strong leaders are always coloring outside the box. As a leader, one must not hesitate to step out in new directions and ask "Why not?"

More often than not -- and, thank goodness, with limited exception -- leaders are forthright and honest. Their ethics can often breed and be contagious, spreading, good or bad, faster from the top down than from the bottom up. Good leadership means treating the followers with trust and dignity and by practicing the Golden Rule. (Do unto others as you would have others do unto you). Leaders are enthusiastic and, ordinarily, this enthusiasm, too, is contagious and spreads faster from the top down than from the bottom up. No plan will work well if the leader does not show enthusiasm for it.

It's been proven time and time again that strong leaders are lifelong learners. Leaders must know a little about everything and a lot about their chosen field. The strong leader is erudite and studies and learns constantly beyond the boundaries of the organization that he/she is leading. Leaders are also winners. More often than not, if we review the lives of those individuals we have admired -- whether from antiquity, military, government, religion or corporations, large and small -- the balance will show there have been more leaders who have received applause than those who have submitted to the barbs of critics.

A great leader will have one unencumbered personal philosophy -- when I succeed, give credit to others; when I fail, don't assume all blame on others. Being able to put one's own feet to the fire isn't easy -- it hurts the feet and, importantly, the ego. But it makes for a leader who stands tall in his shoes -- even if he's short of height!

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