

# What Makes a Great Leader?

A commitment to serve. Across all domains of human endeavor—in organizations large and small, for-profit and nonprofit, professional and volunteer—and throughout human history, great leaders have always put service first. They place the good of the organization above personal goals, and view success as reflected glory, measured in the accomplishments of their colleagues. In a society fascinated with celebrity and its trappings, this, more than any other attribute, is most threatened with extinction. It is this trait, however, that is the cornerstone of great leadership.

## VISION

A great leader has the ability to see where the organization needs to go, and to articulate that direction in a way that inspires people. The vision needs to be rooted in meaningful values, or it will inspire no one.

There are many management styles that successfully convey a vision and create movement, but a leader must first have the courage to realize and admit the organization must actually transform. There will always be a reason for not making a change; a true leader has the conviction to say, "yes, we need to go in that direction."

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Communication is one of the most important tools a leader has. How do you motivate an entire organization? Providing incentives is one way, but great leaders are also able to articulate and frame the issues in a way that their audience can understand and relate to—and in a way that respects

the audience. In the end, a leader must win hearts and minds.

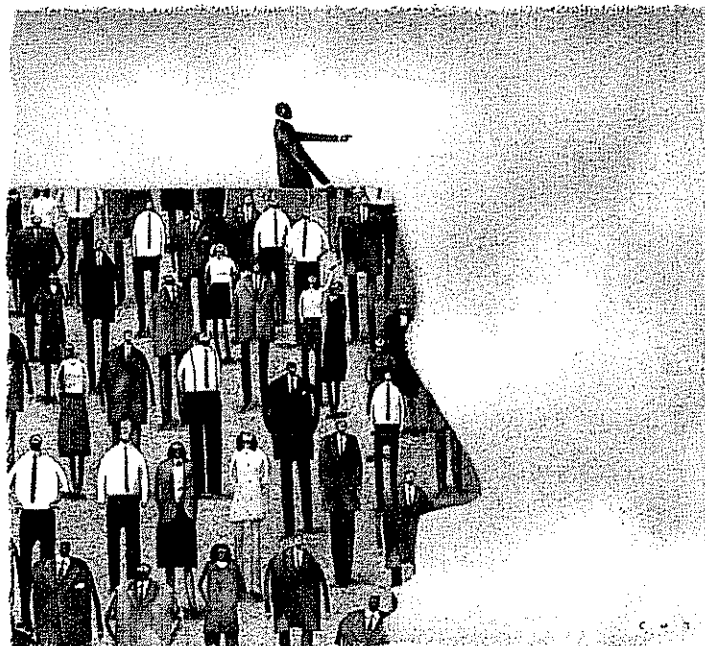
## INSTINCT AND REASON

Great leaders understand the direction their organization is headed, and know where the opportunities are coming from, as well as the threats. They believe passionately in the cause and values of the organization, and the people they are trying to motivate need to believe that it is a passion they can share—that it is sincere and not just an empty slogan.

Resistance to change is a natural process, and leaders will feel it often. However, great leaders see this as an opportunity for learning and growth rather than an obstacle or something to overcome. Emotion is the key. Getting into the hearts and minds of people can help a leader understand and address the anxiety and fears that can serve to hold an organization back.

## LEADERS: BORN OR MADE?

Gifted leaders have high emotional intelligence—they need to empathize with others and appreciate their ideas and concerns. While this is not something that is purely "taught," it does come more naturally to some. However, there is also an enormous amount of learning that goes along with it. Talented leaders are always willing to learn—it is that curiosity and desire to investigate that makes them successful. Many exceptional leaders have also experienced great failure. They have



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confronted it and come to terms with the humbling nature of the experience. They have learned the limits of what they can and can't do.

## DEVELOPING FUTURE LEADERS

So how does one develop the skills to be a great leader? As young people prepare to work in this global economy, it is essential that they learn the communicative, creative and reflective strengths of the arts and sciences, along with the analytical, technological and problem-solving strengths of business—and develop a commitment to serve. While classrooms, student organizations and athletics will continue to provide fertile ground for young minds to grow their leadership abilities, there is another avenue of opportunity rapidly expanding on many campuses today.

Service-learning—integrating meaningful community service

into a curriculum—is one of the most progressive ways to shape our future leaders, providing them with tangible experience beyond the classroom. Service-learning fosters intensive, consultative relationships between students, their teachers and community organizations. It requires reflection and adds to a student's personal and professional growth, while helping to build an appreciation for civic involvement. The benefits are immeasurable, and in the end, we all reap them.

For more information on leadership and service-learning, please contact Bentley College at [http://www.bentley.edu/academics\\_research/alliance](http://www.bentley.edu/academics_research/alliance)

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