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Q: Is 'leadership' innate or can it be developed by intent?

Leadership is a complex composite of commendable personal attributes and ways of acting that result in employees believing in the leader's judgment and direction and wanting to execute or fulfill the leader's assignments and expectations. Is there such a thing as a person being 'a natural' leader, like a natural athlete or a gifted artist or musician whose talent appears to come easily? To an extent, the answer is yes. Leadership qualities come more easily to some rather than others. However, all of the following personal attributes of a good leader can be developed by intent:

Skilled Communicator. An effective communicator, able to clearly explain tasks and inspire others with varying backgrounds and perspectives.

Confidence. Poise, clear thinking under pressure, conviction in the course being set, and decisiveness are characteristics that earn the respect and loyalty of others.

Fairness. Treats people fairly, makes decisions consistent with clearly expressed standards of right and wrong. When handling disputes, the leader's resolution engenders a feeling of justice, equal treatment and evenhandedness. The leader's decisions are sought by others because they generate a feeling of dependability, reliability and stability.

Generosity. A 'giver' rather than 'taker'; a giver of time, knowledge and caring.

Honest. Truthful and openly self-critical with regard to acknowledging own errors.

Humility. Modest about his or her abilities and always respectful of others.

Mastery. The leader's decision-making and performance demonstrate a high personal commitment to acquisition of knowledge, skill mastery and thoughtful action. A leader is a role model who others would like to emulate.

Optimism. Believes that everyone has something important to contribute to the success of the organization; creates an environment that is positive, hopeful and buoyant - a place of working, playing and human interaction that employees and student-athletes enjoy and value.

Selflessness. Puts the needs, interests and wishes of others before his or her own self interest. When the leader asks someone to do something, that person knows that what is being asked is for the larger good or good of another.

Trustworthy. Team members will confide in, rely on and follow the advice and instruction of a good leader because they trust and have faith that the leader is acting in their best interest and know he or she will not reveal confidential information.

The distinction between a 'leader' and a 'manager', both of whom may possess many of these traits, is whether people will follow the leader even if he or she is without the power of formal position. Managers may have title and authority over work to be performed by employees, but this authority and responsibility does not mean that a manager can inspire and motivate people to perform. Workers do what the manager says because they have to. People follow the instructions of leaders because they want to. Of course, every manager should also aspire to be a leader and many managers are.

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Topics

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