

# MASTERING LEADERSHIP –52 ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES OF TRULY SUCCESSFUL CEOS

by

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Winston Churchill, the great British war-time leader, once observed, “Sometimes it is not sufficient to do one’s best – sometimes one has to do what is necessary”. And so it is with leading organisations.

The question of what makes someone a great leader has long exercised many minds, but still the debate rages. Whatever those qualities are, it is clear that we aren’t doing such a good job at producing great leaders – just look at the never-ending stream of management fads over the last 100 years, the countless books and articles, the myriad of university courses and the huge investment in leadership development programs and ask what we have got from it all. Surveys of staff attitudes to their leaders consistently and clearly indicate that the answer is ‘very little’.

From my own experiences, observations, discussions and readings spanning over 30 years, I have concluded that there are certain innate qualities which set good leaders apart. I have identified 52 of these attributes which are listed below.

For those aspiring to be CEOs, this list may seem somewhat daunting. But, to coin a phrase, these are not ‘rocket science’ – they are skills which are readily definable and learnable. In fact, with 52 in the list, why not focus and practice on just one per week and see the amazing difference after only a year?

This is a list to keep in your top drawer and refer to frequently - as a reminder of what is necessary and to help focus your efforts and behaviours. It is also a useful benchmark to assess the leaders you work with. The list is in no particular order.

1. *Adaptable* to changing situations and circumstances
2. Can handle *ambiguity* – is not ‘black and white’
3. *Is analytical* - can get to the core issue quickly
4. *Astute people selection* – does not seek clones but rather those who complement his / her skills and who won’t be afraid to challenge
5. *Balanced* – has a life outside the office
6. *Challenges* the status quo
7. *Clarity* – can think and talk clearly, stays focussed
8. Is a willing and available *coach / mentor* to others
9. Shows *commitment* – to the business, the task in hand, the executive team and staff generally
10. A good *communicator*- both in one-to-one and group situations, as well as in writing – in substance and not just style
11. *Competent* in the role / level
12. *Confident* of his / her ability but keenly sensitive to the dangers of hubris
13. Has the *courage* of his / her convictions– particularly in troubled times, but is not foolhardy
14. *Delegates* – doesn’t try to do everything him/herself, but expects accountability
15. Is clear on his / her *direction* - knows where they are heading and why, and how to get there
16. Has ‘*emotional intelligence*’ - can empathise and manage relationships with others
17. Is *energetic* – but knows when to slow down / switch off

18. Is *engaging* – and genuinely interested in people and their well-being
19. *Minimises the casualties* from his / her decisions
20. Maintains *focus* on the strategic direction
21. *Generates 'buy-in'* from all parties
22. *Humility* – keeps feet on the ground
23. Has high standards of *integrity* – and insists on the same from others
24. *Intellect* – has a high level of intelligence
25. Exercises sound *judgement* – particularly under pressure
26. *Knows the business* and its operating environment well
27. Knows the *questions to ask*
28. Is a good *listener*, emotionally as well
29. Is *numerate* – can read and understand financial statements
30. *Doesn't 'play games'* or mess people around – ensures others do likewise
31. Is *passionate* - about life, the business, family, other interests
32. Has top grade *people skills* – encourages their input, values their opinions, develops their skills and is motivating, supportive, caring and constructively critical
33. Is *perceptive* – can read situations and other people well
34. *Persists* – when the going gets tough...
35. Is *persuasive* – without being bullying or dogmatic
36. *Prioritises* tasks – works on the important stuff
37. Is *resilient* – bounces back from setbacks
38. Is *self-aware* and *self critical* – knows his / her deficiencies and addresses them; can accept criticism from others
39. Has a healthy *self-esteem* – but does not believe he / she is infallible
40. Is *strategic* in thinking and outlook – but is also aware that successful implementation is what counts
41. Is a *team player* – not an autocrat, gives credit to others and seeks and values their opinions
42. *Trusts* others - but verifies what she or he is told
43. Is *trusted* by others – is honest in all dealings
44. *Understands the 'value proposition'* of the business
45. Is *unwavering* in the pursuit of his / her goals – but is aware of risks, monitors progress and is not afraid to change course when needed
46. Has clearly developed and articulated *values*
47. Is *visionary* – can see the big picture and read future trends
48. *Walks the talk* - always
49. Is *consistent* and even-handed in behaviours and decisions
50. *Watches the details* – while delegating and not getting bogged down him / herself; well understands that inattention to the detail can bring them undone
51. Is not afraid to admit *mistakes* – learns from them and moves on
52. Has a degree of *luck*, even though it is true that we can make our own. Sometimes, just being in the right place at the right time does help!

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