Secrets of Leadership Success: Choose to Lead

Introduction to the 10 Secrets of Leadership Success Series

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Key leadership success secrets set the great leaders apart from the so-so leaders in today's organizations. [Leadership style](https://www.thebalance.com/delegation-as-a-leadership-style-1916731) is learned from mentors, learned in seminars and exists as part of a person's innate personal leadership skill set developed over years, and existing possibly, from birth.

Nature or nurture is a question often asked about leadership. I answer, "yes," because I believe the combination of natural leadership skills and nurture through leadership development defines your leadership style.

Working from personal experience and research, I will define the characteristics of leadership that makes great leaders. I envision a series of interlinked articles, each of which focuses on one aspect of leadership.

Leadership differs from management and supervision although some people and organizations use the terms interchangeably. While the definitions of the terms differ, an individual may have the ability to provide all three.

* **Supervision means** that an individual is charged with providing direction and oversight for other employees. The successful supervisor provides recognition, appreciation, training and feedback to reporting employees.
* **Management means** to conduct the affairs of business, to have worked under control and to provide direction, to guide other employees, to administer and organize work processes and systems, and to handle problems. Managers monitor and control work while helping a group of employees more successfully conduct their work than they would have without her.  
    
  A manager’s job is often described as providing everything his reporting [employees](https://www.thebalance.com/what-is-an-employee-1918111) need to successfully accomplish their jobs. One famous quote from Warren Bennis, Ph.D. in *On Becoming a Leader* distinguishes [management](https://www.thebalance.com/what-does-a-manager-do-in-the-workplace-1919121) from leadership: “Managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing.”
* While a supervisor and a manager may also exhibit leadership skill or potential, **true leaders are rare**. This is because the combination of skills, personality, and ambition essential to leadership are difficult to develop and exhibit.  
    
  According to Don Clark, on his excellent leadership resource, [*Big Dog's Leadership Page*](http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leader.html), Bernard "Bass' theory of leadership states that there are three basic ways to explain how people become leaders. The first two explain the leadership development for a small number of people. These theories are:
* Some personality traits may lead people naturally into leadership roles. This is the Trait Theory.
* A crisis or important event may cause a person to rise to the occasion, which brings out extraordinary leadership qualities in an ordinary person. This is the Great Events Theory.
* People can choose to become leaders. People can learn leadership skills. This is the Transformational Leadership Theory.”

The Transformational Leadership Theory is the one I believe is correct for most leaders today. This belief forms the basis for my thinking about leadership.

The Key Leadership Trait

The first, and most important characteristic, of a leader is the decision to become a leader. At some point in time, leaders decide that they want to provide others with [vision](https://www.thebalance.com/build-a-strategic-framework-through-strategic-planning-1916834), direct the course of future events and inspire others to success.

Leadership requires the individual to practice dominance and take charge. If you choose to become a leader, whether in your workplace, community or during an emergency, the discussion of these characteristics will help you formulate the appropriate mix of traits, skills, and ambition.

Successful leaders choose to lead. Unlike Keanu Reeves as Neo in 1999’s smash hit, *The Matrix*, you get to decide whether you are “the one.” The first characteristic of a leader is Choice - leaders choose to lead.

Characteristics of a Successful Leadership Style

Much is written about what makes successful leaders. I will focus on the characteristics, traits and actions that, I believe, are key.

* [Be the person others choose to follow.](https://www.thebalance.com/lead-the-team-how-to-become-the-person-others-follow-1918610)
* [Provide vision for the future.](https://www.thebalance.com/leadership-vision-1918616)
* [Provide inspiration.](https://www.thebalance.com/leadership-inspiration-1918611)
* [Make other people feel important and appreciated.](https://www.thebalance.com/leadership-rewards-and-recognition-1918613)
* [Live your values. Behave ethically.](https://www.thebalance.com/leadership-values-and-workplace-ethics-1918615)
* [Leaders set the pace through your expectations and example](https://www.thebalance.com/leaders-set-expectations-examples-1918620).
* [Establish an environment of continuous improvement.](https://www.thebalance.com/leadership-inspiration-1918611)
* [Provide opportunities for people to grow, both personally and professionally.](https://www.thebalance.com/need-6-strategies-to-promote-the-growth-of-your-employees-1918617)
* [Care and act with compassion.](https://www.thebalance.com/leaders-care-and-act-with-compassion-1918618)