

22 Vital Traits of Effective Leaders

*Based on D.A.Benton's How To Think Like A CEO: The 22 Vital Traits you need to be the person at the top, Warner Books, 1996,
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The 22 Vital Traits

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Approaching the Climb

Vital Trait # 1	Secure in self
Vital Trait # 2	In control of attitude
Vital Trait # 3	Tenacious
Vital Trait # 4	Continuously improving
Vital Trait # 5	Honest and ethical
Vital Trait # 6	Thinking before talking
Vital Trait # 7	Original
Vital Trait # 8	Publicly modest

Vital Trait # 1: *Secure in Self*

- Must be carried both inside the head and in the outside demeanour
- Confidence in yourself
- Self-Respect
- *“No one can make you feel inferior without your consent”*
- Being a “child” – children are not born with self-doubt

Vital Trait # 2: *In control of attitude*

- If you lose control, you lose
- “*We smile because we want to, not because we have to*”
- Success is based more on mental attitude than mental capabilities
- Until and unless you’re in command of your outlook, everyone and anyone can control you
- Switch from “Can I” to “I can” – consistently
- Change outlooks when you need to and want to
- Keep aware and in control of your bearing at all times through your physical and mental demeanour

Vital Trait #3: *Tenacious*

- Keep going until something stops you and keep going
- Persistence, determination and resolution
- Not giving up when everybody else says you should
- Not being stubborn to the level of stupidity
persevere through disappointments, setbacks, frustrations and inequities
- Exceptions – *Know* when to give up, stop, walk away, let go; *Stop* if you are wrong

Vital Trait #4: *Continuously improving*

- “You’ve got to be better and better, and if you don’t, you will be left behind”
- Means learning which begins with birth and ends with death
- Need to identify – what you **need** to know to do your job well; what would be **useful** to know; what would be **fun** to know
- Talk to people, learn from mistakes, learn from others’ experiences, emulate effective leaders, learn something new every day
- Do not learn if you’re using knowledge to hurt someone, do not flaunt your improvement to show how “smart” you are

Vital Trait #5: *Honest and ethical*

- Truth, integrity, being genuine, equitable, fair and frank
- Absence of fraud, deceit, and deception
- *“There is no situational honesty. Honesty is honesty”*
- Integrity goes along with honesty
- Without honesty there is no way to truly be a good human
- Be positively consistent in what you say, think and do

Dos and Don't's

Don't	Dos
Intentionally mislead or misrepresent	Be honest with yourself – internally and externally
Straddle the line	Remember how carefully you disguise the truth, someone will find out
Break promises and go back on your word	Remember your distrust of others will justify their distrust of you
Put a spin on it	Be precise, crisp and move on
	Understand <i>misunderstanding</i>
	Stop exaggeration

Vital Trait #6: *Thinking before talking*

- You are more responsible for your words and their result
- You appear more intelligent
- You avoid repeating yourself
- “*Act quickly, think slowly*”
- Pre-thinking enables you to avoid saying something you wish you hadn’t
- “*Don’t speak so **much**, don’t speak too **quickly***”
- Use silence

Silence

- Lets you rest your mind and hear yourself
- Keep secrets
- Avoid arguments
- Allows you to observe others
- Suggest latent power
- Can be don in any language

Vital Trait #7: *Original*

- The principal source of human improvement
- Be inventive, different, imaginative and original
- “*Imagination is more important than knowledge*”
- Watch, carefully observe what most people are doing in any situation, and *don't do that*
- Find better ways of doing things
- Be open and ready for change
- Never be satisfied with maintaining the status quo
- Leadership vision is all about originality

How to be more original

- Decide to be
- Be easy on yourself
- Support others
- Keep at it

Vital Trait #8: *Publicly modest*

- Secure people can be publicly modest
- Speak with moderate estimation of their talents, abilities and value
- Does not mean being shy and undervaluing yourself
- Take credit that is deserved but share credit more than deserved

Approaching the Climb Summary

<i>Be secure in yourself</i>	No one makes you feel inferior without your consent
<i>Be in control of your attitude</i>	Success is based on mental attitude than mental capabilities
<i>Be tenacious</i>	Nothing ever happens with one letter, one telephone call, one request
<i>Be continuously improving</i>	Take risks. Mistakes provide some of your best learning
<i>Be honest and ethical</i>	If you are careless with the truth, your credibility will be jeopardized when you are telling the truth
<i>Be sure to think before you talk</i>	Think fast, pause, then speak purposely
<i>Be silent</i>	Listen much more than you talk. Talk little, but say a lot in the few words that you do so
<i>Be original</i>	Watch, carefully observe what most people are doing in any situation, and don't do that
Be publicly modest	It is better to have other recognize your abilities rather than you pointing out first. Be patient but be persistent. " <i>Never underestimate a man who overestimates himself</i> " FDR.

*The higher you go up the mountain, the
more treacherous the climb, the more
important it is to slow down and think things
through.*

You'll enjoy the view a lot more also!

Putting It Into Practice

Vital Trait # 9	Aware of style
Vital Trait # 10	Gutsy/A little wild
Vital Trait # 11	Humorous
Vital Trait # 12	A tad theatrical
Vital Trait # 13	Detailed oriented

Vital Trait #9:

Aware of Style

- Effective style is best defined as proper behaviour at a given time
- An ineffective is being one way all the time with everyone
- Be aware of your type
- Be aware of others' style
- Develop new ways of behaviour and a new operating style
- Don't guess another's predominant style

Vital Trait #10:

Gutsy/A little wild

- *“Take risks, be bold, take chance”*
- Being gutsy is the ability to face difficulties with a firm resolve despite criticisms, attacks and ridicule
- *“Not guts, no glory”*
- Doing things others are afraid to do
- True courage comes from reasoning as well as instinct

Vital Trait #11:

Humorous

- You have to have (and use) sense of humour
- Humour is the great equalizer, cutting across boundaries of culture, rank and other seeming limitations
- Secure people can laugh at themselves
- People like people with whom they can laugh

Vital Trait #12:

A tad theatrical

- Every leader uses theatrics to some degree
- Theatrics is taking on the responsibility to do all one can to effectively influence people around
- A leader have to turn to drama to demonstrate fervour
- Being a tad theatrical is not an affection
- Nothing is more ridiculous than acting like you have qualities you don't have
- Leaders don't act when conveying concern, care, sympathy or interest

Vital Trait #13:

Detailed Oriented

- The higher you go, the more critical it is to be aware of the details
- Leaders are detailed oriented – aware of as many aspects of what's going on as possible
- Being detailed oriented on the small things helps you achieve the focus necessary for the big things
- It does not mean nit-picking but being specific, taking full responsibility for outcomes
- It does not mean being so immersed in minutiae that you lose the big scene
- Paying attention to details saves you time that would be lost in going down the wrong path
- *“Think small, it's the details you are after”*

Putting Into Practice Summary

<i>Be aware of your style</i>	Style does not pertain to clothes, it is what you do with the clothes
<i>Be gutsy</i>	List the things that scare you the most – then tackle your to-do list
<i>Be humorous</i>	It takes courage to inject levity into serious situations – but somebody has to do it, so it might well be you
<i>Be a tad theatrical</i>	Get comfortable with the uncomfortable
<i>Be detailed oriented</i>	The small things will always make the biggest difference

*Act like a chief to become a
chief*

Bridging Gaps

Vital Trait # 14	Good at their job and willing to lead	
Vital Trait # 15	Fighters for their people	
Vital Trait # 16	Willing to admit mistakes, yet are unapologetic	
Vital Trait # 17	Straightforward	
Vital Trait # 18	Nice	
Vital Trait # 19	Inquisitive	
Vital Trait # 20	Competitive	
Vital Trait # 21	Flexible	
Vital Trait # 22	Good storytellers	

Vital Trait #14:

Good at their job and willing to lead

- A leader must execute the job with technical excellence while relating well with people
- Being good at your job involves being both a specialist and a generalist
- Be willing to lead – willing to step out front, to take risks
- You have to be someone worth listening to, worth believing and worth following
- Leadership isn't just learned, it's earned

Leaders

- Set clear expectations for people
- Use physical presence
- Be an obvious presence in the organization
- Don't communicate "ownership" of an idea too early into the problem-solving session
- Check up on yourself periodically
- Decide and plan 4 to 5 things you want done
- Ask you key people, key questions to keep them on target

Vital Trait #15:

Fighters for their people

- If you want people to back you, back them, back them, back them
- Be loyal downward, spread credit downward
- Share the spirit and share the lead
- Leaders publicly support their people, privately they might take them aside to “correct” their thinking

Vital Trait #16:

Willing to admit mistakes yet are unapologetic

- A mistake is an error, fault, misunderstanding, blunder, slip-up, flaw or *faux pas*
- When it happens admit it, stop it, correct it and don't repeat it
- Only dead people don't make mistakes
- If you are error free you are effort free
- Admitting mistakes is *not* being apologetic
- Apologizing unnecessarily is unflattering
- Admitting mistakes is not the same as frequently apologizing – the first is necessary, the second is tedious
- Justifiable apology is good manners, which is different from an apologetic attitude

Vital Trait #17: ***Straightforward***

- Be direct, honest, frank and follow a straight course
- Don't distort, twist, deviate or trick
- Before talking, ask yourself: *What are we talking?, What do I want to accomplish?, In what order?*
- Write from the heart

Vital Trait #18: ***Being Nice***

- Does not mean being concerned about being liked
- Based on a simple value system: respect people (people who work for you and people you work for); what goes around comes around; benevolence helps you enjoy your good work
- Leaders make a decision on what's right, not what's popular
- Practice (if necessary) being nice
- Being nice cannot be an act

Don't become arrogant

- Don't treat your staff like personal servants
- Don't try to bully or pull rank
- Don't think your work is more important than your family
- Don't make public spectacles attacking or embarrassing people
- Don't think you don't need to be held accountable for your words

Vital Trait #19: *Inquisitive*

- One of the single most important traits of leaders is curiosity
- You have to initiate asking, getting answers and really hearing answers
- In all situations, ask rather than assume or guess
- The key is attitude and technique

Vital Trait #20: ***Being Competitive***

- Is a good thing for personal and professional growth
- Carefully choose among the battles that comes your way
- Seek out “test” battles if not enough come your way
- Maintain your sense of humour
- Remember the competitive version of the golden rule:
They will do to you what you'd do to them, if you had thought of it first
- You don't learn from success, you learn from the battle

Vital Trait #21: ***Being Flexible***

- Means not being stubborn, ceremonious, rigid, unyielding or unbending
- Does not mean being wishy-washy or undisciplined
- People can and must modify their response to new circumstances
- Able to turn easily from one situation or subject to another
- Ability to rub shoulders with workers on the shop floor as well as community leaders at a social gathering
- Able to admit mistakes which can make you even more effective

Vital Trait #22: ***Good storytellers***

- Leaders use anecdotes to describe, dramatize and paint pictures to relentlessly communicate
- Make information memorable, recallable, clear, useful and appropriate
- Stories should be: true, appropriate, well-told, concise, new

Bridging Gaps Summary

<i>Be willing to lead</i>	Be worth listening to, worth believing, worth following
<i>Be sure to fight for your people</i>	Be loyal downward; spread credit downward
<i>Be certain to admit mistakes</i>	If you are error free, you are effort free
<i>Be unapologetic</i>	Apologies are used to vindicate themselves for something they don't plan to change anyway
<i>Be straightforward</i>	Everything you say or write must be done in a plain, simple manner
<i>Be nice</i>	The more power and prestige you hold the more you need to be nice
<i>Be inquisitive</i>	Ask, ask, ask, and then ask more
<i>Be competitive</i>	You don't learn from easy successes, only from the hard struggles
<i>Be flexible</i>	Stand out from the crowd while still fitting in with the crowd
<i>Be a good storyteller</i>	Use anecdotes to make your points

*Being good at your job so you
can effectively lead others to be
good at their jobs*