

Would You Like to Lead?

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Leadership is a word that conjures up a myriad of thoughts when someone asks the question, "What makes a good leader?" One may find books or lists of specific skills that have been compiled outlining the necessary strategies of an effective leader. Every good leader has a specific reference point that they acknowledge, whether it is a mentor or a basic principle they turn towards, which has given them the support they need for a successful career.



Stephen Covey (1991) has listed the following characteristics as contributors to effective principle-centered leaders.

1. *They are continually learning.* Principle-centered people are constantly educated by their experiences.
2. *They are service oriented.* Those striving to be principle-centered leaders see life as a mission.
3. *They radiate positive energy.* Principle-centered people are cheerful, pleasant, and happy.
4. *They believe in other people.* Principle-centered people do not over-react to negative behaviours, criticisms, or human weaknesses.
5. *They lead balance lives.* They read the best literature and keep up with current affairs and events.
6. *They see life as an adventure.* Principle-centered people savor life, they have no need to categorize or stereotype people and events.
7. *They are synergistic.* Principle-centered people serve as change catalysts in organizations, and they improve most situations in which they become involved.
8. *They exercise self renewal.* They regularly exercise the four dimensions of the human personality: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

Other writers on the subject of strong leadership have echoed similar qualities. Ideals such as vision, participative management, organization, communication, and positive support with focus.

Each of these qualities holds merit and is essential for a leader to be successful, but what really determines the success of a leader? When researchers have looked at this topic through the professional lives of beginning principals, three areas of importance consistently are singled out as necessary characteristics for any administrator. John Daresh (2001) states from his research the following skills as the leading response worthy of any administrator's attention: technical skills, socialization and self-awareness or role awareness.

To determine the importance of these critical skills as they relate to certain job tasks, three different groups were approached to rate the importance of these tasks for success.

Principals with at least five years of experience ranked the three critical areas in the following way:

1. Socialization skills (most)
2. Self awareness and role awareness
3. Technical and managerial skills (least)

Superintendents who had recently hired a principal ranked the skills as follows:

1. Self awareness and role awareness (most)
2. Socialization skills
3. Technical and managerial skills (least)

The final group, professionals enrolled in a university program leading to administrative certification ranked the three areas as follows:

1. Technical and managerial skills (most)
2. Socialization skills
3. Self awareness - role awareness (least)

In summarizing these findings it is quite clear that there are some important differences in ranking. However, as people become more experienced as administrators, they may downgrade the importance of technical skills and see socialization, role awareness as being more critical factors in being an effective leader. The key to being effective is the development of a proper balance between these essential areas. Letting the community know that you are looking out for the welfare of their most important asset, their children.

Resources:

- Covey, S.R. (1991). *Principle-centered leadership: Strategies for Personal and Professional Effectiveness*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Daresh, J.C. (2001). *Beginning the Principalship*. Thousand Oaks, California. Corwin.