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Small Business Advisor:

5 Key Traits of Great Leaders

SUMMARY: Don't miss your next great leader. This article reveals the five things you can do to attract and retain outstanding employees.

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company's policies and procedures is all well and good, but it doesn't speak to having a vision. As a leader, you have to learn to communicate your vision or the vision of your company to the people you want to follow you. But how can you do that?

- Learn to paint a picture with words. Speak it, write it, draw it, touch it. Whatever methods you can use to create a picture, do it. As they say, "A picture is worth a thousand words."
- Ask each of the other managers in your company to tell you, in their own words, about the vision of the company. How close is it to what you thought they understood? Is your team on

According to *Lessons From the Top: The Search for America's Best Business Leaders*, Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks, made the following observation:

"I think it's very difficult to lead today when people are not really truly participating in the decision. You won't be able to attract and retain great people if they don't feel like they are part of the authorship of the strategy and the authorship of the really critical issues. If you don't give people an opportunity to really be engaged, they won't stay."

As an entrepreneur with employees, one of your primary goals is most likely to attract and keep motivated workers. So let's explore the five key traits that will help you become the kind of leader people love working for.

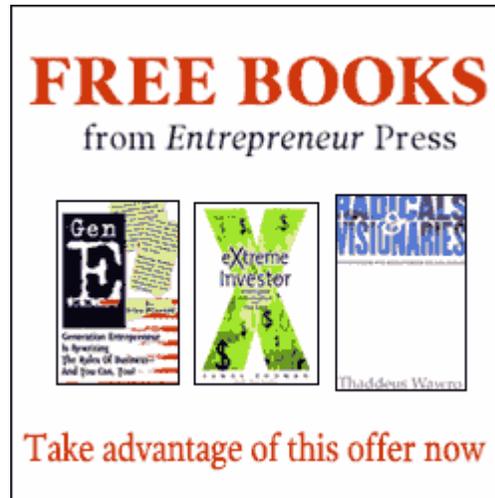
Key Trait #1: You must have a vision. We've all heard the saying "You must stand for something, or you'll fall for everything." But what does that really mean? Standing firm when it comes to your

the same page as you?

- As you work, your company's vision should be in your mind every day, and you should reevaluate it occasionally so that it stays current with the changing times in which we live. And remember, your staff needs to be just as involved as you in keeping it up to date if you truly want them to buy in on the vision. Be sure to keep your key players involved.

Key Trait #2: You must have passion. Your employees want passion; in fact, they'll go to the ends of earth because of it, live and die for it. Think of the sailors who traveled with Christopher Columbus or Leif Ericsson to explore uncharted territory. Their leaders' passion inspired them to take on new and very dangerous challenges.

To build an extraordinary management team, you've got to light the "fire in their bellies," to get them to feel passion about the company and connect to the leader's vision. Passion is such a key part of being a great leader that if you don't have it, you simply can't be a great leader. Think of all the great leaders throughout the ages and try to name one that did not have passion.



And passion is infectious: When you talk about your vision for the company, let your passion for your vision shine through. Others will feel it and want to get on board with you. If you don't have passion for your vision, you need to recreate your vision or reframe your description of your vision so it's connected to your passion.

Key Trait #3: You must learn to be a great decision maker. How are major decisions made in your company? What is your process for making them? For instance, do you talk to your management team and create a list of pros and cons to help you make the best decision? Maybe you conduct a cost analysis. Or do you create a timeline for the implementation strategy, process and timing?

Some leaders have a set process, and others fly by the seat of their pants. But you don't want to be one of those leaders who consults no one before making a decision, announces the change the next day and then gets frustrated when no one follows it. If you're one of those, I urge you to implement a set process.

In fact, here's a system you can use to become a better decision maker. It's called the Q-CAT:

- Q = Quick. Be quick but not hasty.
- C = Committed. Be committed to your decision but not rigid.
- A = Analytical. Be analytical, but don't over-analyze (Too much analysis can cause paralysis.)
- T = Thoughtful. Be thoughtful about all concerned, but don't be obsessive.

When you use the Q-CAT, it'll help you to decide when to bring others into the process and what steps need to be taken to help you make better decisions.

Key Trait #4: You must be a team builder. To become a great leader, you must develop a great team or, one might say, a well-oiled machine. But how do you do that? You can start by handing off

responsibility to your team and letting your team to run with it. Don't breathe down their necks and don't micromanage, but make yourself available if questions or problems come up. Teach your team to use the Q-CAT decision-making system and give them the freedom to work through their own decisions.

When projects aren't on track or your team is falling behind on deadline, it serves no one if you start pointing fingers. This is when you need to rise to the occasion and inspire confidence in your employees, to let them know you support them and ready to help. Be ready to alter plans and make new ones. Don't forget to use humor to keep your team's spirits up during a crisis. When an emergency hits, your team will look to you to be a tower of strength and endurance.

Key Trait #5: You must have character. Without character, all the other "keys" are for naught. That's because your innate character strengths and limitations play a critical role in your leadership style. The real question is, are you aware of just what role they play? All great leaders have taken steps to learn about their individual personality and what part it plays in their leadership style.

So what's your leadership style? If you don't know, there are many leadership style assessments available on the market. Two popular ones that have been around for many years are the Myers-Briggs assessment and the "360-Degree Feedback" model. There are dozens of other to choose from - the important part is that you "Just do it," as the Nike ad would say, and see how you rate. It's a good way to do a "character check" on yourself and your leadership skills.

Then, once you've done the assessment, the question to ask yourself is, do you feel your character matches what the assessments are pointing out to you?

If you feel the traits don't match who you think you are, then look a little deeper and be honest with yourself. Sometimes our first response is defensive. You might want to assess yourself with a different type of profile and then compare the results. Within the 360 Degree Feedback model, there's an opportunity to see how your employees and peers view you, too. In learning to be a great leader, the first step is to be open to feedback about yourself as a leader and separate it from you the person.

So are you a great leader? Or do you have the desire to become one? Remember, a great leader is someone who has a clear vision and can turn that vision into a vivid picture that others can see. When you speak about your vision, it should be with a passion you feel in your heart, a passion that creates so much enthusiasm that your team will want to jump on board. When major decisions need to be made, you should encourage everyone to use the Q-CAT system and be responsible for his or her own actions. And you should be continually assessing your own character and never stop growing, personally or professionally.

If you can apply the five keys to great leadership, you'll be well on your way to becoming a great leader surrounded by great employees!

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By Patty Vogan

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