

2 Recognizing Your Traits

Introduction

Why are some people leaders while others are not? What makes people become leaders? Do leaders have certain traits? These questions have been of interest for many years. It seems that all of us want to know what characteristics account for effective leadership. This chapter will address the traits that are important to leadership.



Is Leadership a Trait?

Since the early 20th century, hundreds of research studies have been conducted on the traits of leaders. These studies have produced an extensive list of ideal leadership traits (see Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004; Bass, 1990). The list of important leadership traits is long and includes such traits as diligence, trustworthiness, dependability, articulateness, sociability, open-mindedness, intelligence, confidence, self-assurance, and conscientiousness. Because the list is so extensive, it is difficult to identify specifically which traits are essential for leaders. In fact, nearly all of the traits are probably related to effective leadership.

What traits are important when you are asked to be a leader? To answer this question, two areas will be addressed in this chapter. First, a set of selected traits that appear by all accounts to be strongly related to effective leadership in everyday life will be discussed. Second, the lives of several historical and contemporary leaders will be examined with a discussion of the traits that play a role in their leadership. Throughout this discussion, the unique ways that certain traits affect the leadership process in one way or another will be emphasized.

2.1 Leadership Traits Explained

From the beginning of the 20th century to the present day, researchers have focused a great deal of attention on the unique characteristics of successful leaders. Thousands of studies have been conducted to identify the traits of effective leaders. The results of these studies have produced a very long list of important leadership traits; each of these traits contributes to the leadership process.

For example, research studies by several investigators found the following traits to be important: achievement, persistence, insight, initiative, self-confidence, responsibility, cooperativeness, tolerance, influence, sociability, drive, motivation, integrity, confidence, cognitive ability, task knowledge, extroversion, conscientiousness, and openness (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Stogdill, 1974). On the international level, House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004), in a study of 17,000 managers in 62 different cultures, identified a list of 22 valued traits that were universally endorsed as characteristics of outstanding leadership in these countries. The list, which was outlined in **Table 1.1** (<http://content.thuzelearning.com/books/Northouse.1564.17.1/sections/navpoint-9#s9781506378381.i661>) in **Chapter 1** ([s9781506378381.i610.xhtml](http://content.thuzelearning.com/books/Northouse.1564.17.1/sections/navpoint-9#s9781506378381.i610.xhtml)), “Understanding Leadership,” includes such attributes as being trustworthy, just, honest, encouraging, positive, dynamic, dependable, intelligent, decisive, communicative, informed, and a team builder. As these findings indicate, research studies on leadership traits have identified a wide array of important characteristics of leaders.



Are There Certain Traits a Leader Needs?

However, these research findings raise an important question: If there are so many important leadership traits, which *specific traits* do people need to be successful leaders? While the answer to this question is not crystal clear, the research points to *six key traits: intelligence, confidence, charisma, determination, sociability, and integrity*. In the following section, we will discuss each of these traits in turn.

Intelligence

Intelligence is an important trait related to effective leadership. Intelligence includes having good language skills, perceptual skills, and reasoning ability. This combination of assets makes people good thinkers, and makes them better leaders.

While it is hard for a person to alter his or her IQ (intelligence quotient), there are certain ways for a person to improve intelligence in general. Intelligent leaders are well informed. They are aware of what is going on around them and understand the job that needs to be done. It is important for leaders to obtain information about what their leadership role entails and learn as much as possible about their work environment. This information will help leaders be more knowledgeable and insightful.

For example, a few years ago a friend, Chris, was asked to be the coach of his daughter’s middle school soccer team even though he had never played soccer and knew next to nothing about how the game is played. Chris took the job and eventually was a great success, but not without a lot of effort. He spent many hours learning about soccer. He read how-to books, instructors’ manuals, and coaching books. In addition, Chris subscribed to several soccer magazines. He talked to other coaches and learned everything

he could about playing the game. By the time he had finished the first season, others considered Chris to be a very competent coach. He was smart and learned how to be a successful coach.

Regarding intelligence, few if any of us can expect to be another Albert Einstein. Most of us have average intelligence and know that there are limits to what we can do. Nevertheless, becoming more knowledgeable about our leadership positions gives us the information we need to become better leaders.

Confidence

Being confident is another important trait of an effective leader. Confident people feel self-assured and believe they can accomplish their goals. Rather than feeling uncertain, they feel strong and secure about their positions. They do not second-guess themselves, but rather move forward on projects with a clear vision. Confident leaders feel a sense of certainty and believe that they are doing the right thing. Clearly, **confidence** is a trait that has to do with feeling positive about oneself and one's ability to succeed.

If confidence is a central trait of successful leaders, how can you build your own confidence? First, confidence comes from *understanding* what is required of you. For example, when first learning to drive a car, a student's confidence is low because he or she does not know *what* to do. If an instructor explains the driving process and demonstrates how to drive, the student can gain confidence because he or she now has an understanding of how to drive. Awareness and understanding build confidence. Confidence can also come from having a mentor to show the way and provide constructive feedback. This mentor may be a boss, an experienced coworker, or a significant other from outside the organization. Because mentors act as role models and sounding boards, they provide essential help to learn the dynamics of leadership.

Confidence also comes from *practice*. This is important to point out, because practice is something everyone can do. Consider Michael Phelps, one of the most well-known athletes in the world today. Phelps is a very gifted swimmer, with 23 Olympic gold medals and the record for winning the most medals, 28, of any Olympic athlete in history. But Phelps also spends an enormous amount of time practicing. His workout regimen includes swimming six hours a day, six days a week. His excellent performance and confidence are a result of his practice, as well as his gifts.

In leadership, practice builds confidence because it provides assurance that an aspiring leader can do what needs to be done. Taking on leadership roles, even minor ones on committees or through volunteer activities, provides practice for being a leader. Building one leadership activity on another can increase confidence for more demanding leadership roles. Those who accept opportunities to practice their leadership will experience increased confidence in their leadership abilities.

Charisma

Of all the traits related to effective leadership, charisma gets the most attention. **Charisma** refers to a leader's special magnetic charm and appeal, and can have a huge effect on the leadership process. Charisma is a special personality characteristic that gives a leader the capacity to do extraordinary things. In particular, it gives the leader exceptional powers of influence. A good example of a charismatic leader is former president John F. Kennedy, who motivated the American people with his eloquent oratorical style (visit edge.sagepub.com/northouseintro4e (<http://edge.sagepub.com/northouseintro4e>) to read one of his speeches). President Kennedy was a gifted, charismatic leader who had an enormous impact on others.



Charismatic Leadership

It is not unusual for many of us to feel challenged with regard to charisma because it is not a common personality trait. There are a few select people who are very charismatic, but most of us are not. Since charisma appears in short supply, the question arises: What do leaders do if they are not naturally charismatic?

Based on the writings of leadership scholars, several behaviors characterize charismatic leadership (Conger, 1999; House, 1976; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). First, charismatic leaders serve as a *strong role model* for the values that they desire others to adopt. Mohandas Gandhi advocated nonviolence and was an exemplary role model of civil disobedience; his charisma enabled him to influence others. Second, charismatic leaders *show competence* in every aspect of leadership, so others trust their decisions. Third, charismatic leaders *articulate clear goals* and *strong values*. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech is an example of this type of charismatic leadership. By articulating his dream, he was able to influence multitudes of people to follow his nonviolent practices. Fourth, charismatic leaders communicate *high expectations* for followers and *show confidence* in their abilities to meet these expectations. Finally, charismatic leaders are an *inspiration* to others. They can excite and motivate others to become involved in real change, as demonstrated by John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Determination

Determination is another trait that characterizes effective leaders. Determined leaders are very focused and attentive to tasks. They know *where* they are going and *how* they intend to get there. Determination is the decision to get the job done; it includes characteristics such as initiative, persistence, and drive. People with determination are willing to assert themselves, they are proactive, and they have the capacity to persevere in the face of obstacles. Being determined includes showing dominance at times, especially in situations where others need direction.

We have all heard of determined people who have accomplished spectacular things—the person with cancer who runs a standard 26.2-mile marathon, the blind person who climbs Mount Everest, or the single mom with four kids who graduates from college. A good example of determined leadership is Nelson Mandela, who is featured in the Leadership Snapshot in this chapter. Mandela's single goal was to end apartheid in South Africa. Even though he was imprisoned for many years, he steadfastly held to his principles. He was committed to reaching his goal, and he never wavered from his vision. Mandela was focused and disciplined—a determined leader.

What distinguishes all of these leaders from other people is their determination to get the job done. Of all the traits discussed in this chapter, determination is probably the one trait that is easily acquired by those who lead. All it demands is perseverance. Staying focused on the task, clarifying the goals, articulating the vision, and encouraging others to stay the course are characteristics of determined leaders. Being determined takes discipline and the ability to endure, but having this trait will almost certainly enhance a person's leadership.

Sociability

Another important trait for leaders is **sociability**. Sociability refers to a leader's capacity to establish pleasant social relationships. People want sociable leaders—leaders with whom they can get along. Leaders who show sociability are friendly, outgoing, courteous, tactful, and diplomatic. They are sensitive

to others' needs and show concern for their well-being. Sociable leaders have good interpersonal skills and help to create cooperative relationships within their work environments.

Being sociable comes easier for some than for others. For example, it is easy for extroverted leaders to talk to others and be outgoing, but it is harder for introverted leaders to do so. Similarly, some individuals are naturally "people persons," while others prefer to be alone. Although people vary in the degree to which they are outgoing, it is possible to increase sociability. A sociable leader gets along with coworkers and other people in the work setting. Being friendly, kind, and thoughtful, as well as talking freely with others and giving them support, goes a long way to establish a leader's sociability. Sociable leaders bring positive energy to a group and make the work environment a more enjoyable place.

To illustrate, consider the following example. This scenario occurred in one of the best leadership classes I have had in 40 years of teaching. In this class, there was a student named Anne Fox who was a very sociable leader. Anne was an unusual student who dressed like a student from the 1960s, although it was more than two decades later. Even though she dressed differently than the others, Anne was very caring and was liked by everyone in the class. After the first week of the semester, Anne could name everyone in class; when attendance was taken, she knew instantly who was there and who was not. In class discussions, Anne always contributed good ideas, and her remarks were sensitive of others' points of view. Anne was positive about life, and her attitude was contagious. By her presence, Anne created an atmosphere in which everyone felt unique but also included. She was the glue that held us all together. Anne was not assigned to be the leader in the class, but by the semester's end she emerged as a leader. Her sociable nature enabled her to develop strong relationships and become a leader in the class. By the end of the class, all of us were the beneficiaries of her leadership.

Integrity

Finally, and perhaps most important, effective leaders have **integrity**. Integrity characterizes leaders who possess the qualities of honesty and trustworthiness. People who adhere to a strong set of principles and take responsibility for their actions are exhibiting integrity. Leaders with integrity inspire confidence in others because they can be trusted to do what they say they are going to do. They are loyal, dependable, and transparent. Basically, integrity makes a leader believable and worthy of our trust.

Leadership Snapshot: Nelson Mandela, First Black President of South Africa



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In 1990, when Nelson Mandela was released from prison after serving 27 long years, he was determined not to be angry or vindictive, but instead to work to unite his country of South Africa, which had been fractured by generations of apartheid.

The descendent of a tribal king, Mandela was born in 1918 in a small African village and grew up in a country where Whites ruled through subjugation and tyranny over Blacks and other races. Mandela attended Methodist missionary schools and put himself through law school, eventually opening the first Black law partnership in 1942. His firm represented the African National Congress (ANC), which was engaged in resisting South Africa's apartheid policies, and during the 1950s, he became a leader of the ANC. Influenced by Mohandas Gandhi, Mandela was initially committed to nonviolent resistance but shifted to supporting violent tactics when the government refused to change its apartheid policies. In 1964, Mandela received a life sentence for plotting to overthrow the government by violence.

During the nearly three decades Mandela spent in prison, he became a symbolic figure for the anti-apartheid movement. But during those years, Mandela spent time examining himself, coming to see himself as others did: as an aggressive and militant revolutionary. He learned to control his temper and strong will, instead using persuasion and emphasis to convince others. He listened to others' life stories, including those of the White guards, seeking to understand their perspectives. He was steadfast in maintaining his dignity, carefully refusing to be subservient while being respectful to the guards and others. As a result, he became a natural leader inside the prison, while outside, his fame framed him as a symbolic martyr not only to Black Africans but also to people across the globe. Free Mandela campaigns were building around the world, with other countries and international corporations being pressured by stockholders and citizens to "divest" in South Africa.

In 1990, South African president F. W. de Klerk, fearing civil war and economic collapse, released Mandela, at the time 71, from prison. Mandela emerged as a moral leader who stood by the principles of liberty and equal rights for all. He began speaking around the world,

raising financial support for the ANC while seeking to bring peace to his fractured country. In 1992, the South African government instituted a new constitution and held a popular election with all parties represented including the ANC. The result? In 1994, Mandela was elected as the first Black president of South Africa, effectively ending apartheid. For his role in negotiations to abolish apartheid, Mandela received the Nobel Peace Prize, sharing it with de Klerk.

As president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999, Mandela's mission was to transform a nation from minority rule and apartheid to a multiracial democracy. On the first day of his presidency, he set the tone with the predominantly White staff of the former president, telling them that those who wanted to keep their jobs were welcome to stay, stating "Reconciliation starts here." He developed a multiracial staff and cabinet, using his friendly smiling style and tactic of listening to all viewpoints carefully before making decisions to keep the staff focused on problems and issues rather than on partisanship.

Mandela served his five-year term as president but, at 76 years old, chose not to seek another term. In retirement, he continued to advocate for social causes, serving as a mediator in disputes outside of South Africa, and to bring a message of peace and justice throughout the world. Mandela died in 2013. While it is difficult to summarize all that he accomplished, Mandela's legacy is best described by former U.S. president Bill Clinton who in 2003 wrote, "Under a burden of oppression he saw through difference, discrimination and destruction to embrace our common humanity."

Grown-ups often tell children, "Never tell a lie." For children, the lesson is "Good children are truthful." For leaders, the lesson is the same: "Good leaders are honest." Dishonesty creates mistrust in others, and dishonest leaders are seen as undependable and unreliable. Honesty helps people to have trust and faith in what leaders have to say and what they stand for. Honesty also enhances a leader's ability to influence others because they have confidence in and believe in their leader.

Integrity demands being open with others and representing reality as fully and completely as possible. However, this is not an easy task: There are times when telling the complete truth can be destructive or counterproductive. The challenge for leaders is to strike a balance between being open and candid and monitoring what is appropriate to disclose in a particular situation. While it is important for leaders to be authentic, it is also essential for them to have integrity in their relationships with others.

Integrity undergirds all aspects of leadership. It is at the core of being a leader. Integrity is a central aspect of a leader's ability to influence. If people do not trust a leader, the leader's influence potential is weakened. In essence, integrity is the bedrock of who a leader is. When a leader's integrity comes into question, his or her potential to lead is lost.

Former president Bill Clinton (1993–2001) is a good example of how integrity is related to leadership. In the late 1990s, he was brought before the U.S. Congress for misrepresenting under oath an affair he had engaged in with a White House intern. For his actions, he was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives, but then was acquitted by the U.S. Senate. At one point during the long ordeal, the president appeared on national television and, in what is now a famous speech, declared his innocence. Because subsequent hearings provided information suggesting he might have lied during his television speech, many Americans felt Clinton had violated his duty and responsibility as a person, leader, and

president. As a result, Clinton's integrity was clearly challenged and the impact of his leadership substantially weakened.



Effective Traits

In conclusion, there are many traits related to effective leadership. The six traits discussed here appear to be particularly important in the leadership process. As will be revealed in subsequent chapters, leadership is a very complex process. The traits discussed in this chapter are important but are only one dimension of a multidimensional process.

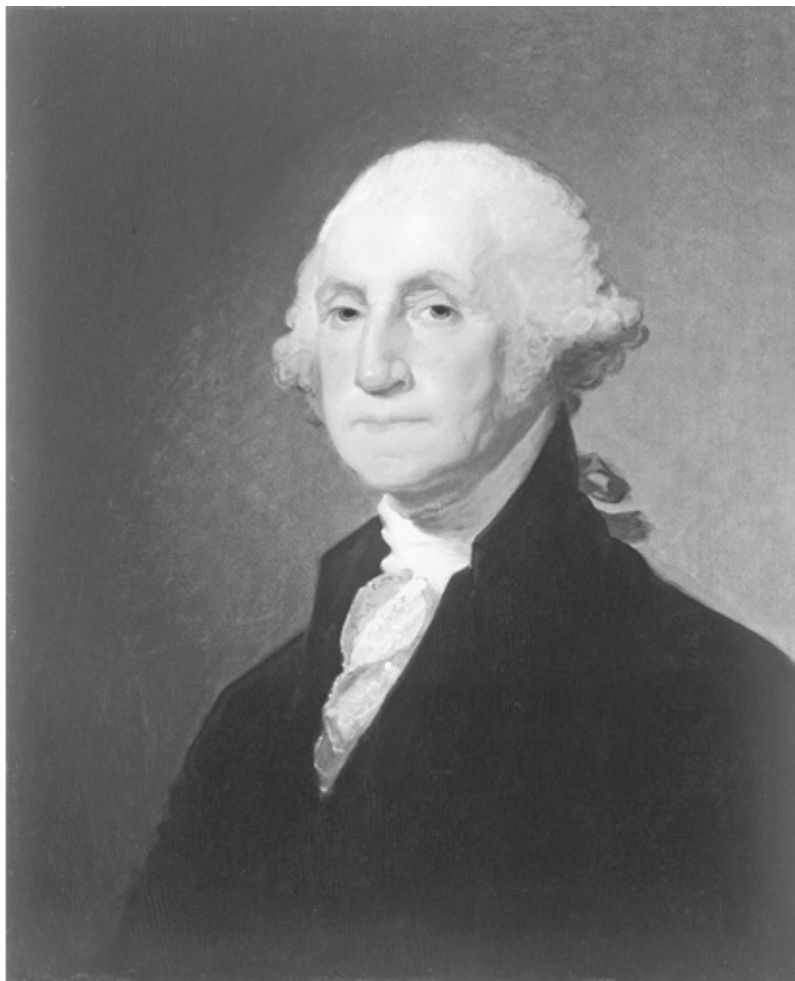
2.2 Leadership Traits in Practice

Throughout history, there have been many great leaders. Each of them has led with unique talents and in different circumstances. The following section analyzes the accomplishments and the traits of five famous leaders. Although there are hundreds of equally distinguished leaders, these five are highlighted because they represent different kinds of leadership at different points in history. All of these leaders are recognized as being notable leaders: Each has had an impact on many people's lives and accomplished great things.

The leaders discussed below are George Washington, Winston Churchill, Mother Teresa, Bill Gates, and Oprah Winfrey. As you read about each of them, think about their leadership traits.

George Washington (1732–1799)

George Washington is considered to be the founding father of the United States of America. His leadership was pivotal in the development of this country's government. He was truly respected by everyone, from low-ranking soldiers to feisty public officials. He was a man of great integrity who was a good listener. After the Revolutionary War, Washington was *the* reason that various factions did not splinter into small groups or nations. He became the United States' first president because his leadership was so well suited for the times.



Gilbert Stuart /National Gallery of Art/Getty Images

Born into a prosperous Virginia family, he grew up on a large plantation. His father died when he was 11. Washington received formal schooling for seven years and then worked as a surveyor. He entered the military at the age of 20. During the French and Indian War, Washington learned about the difficulties of battle and experienced both victories and defeats. He served as commander in chief of the Continental Army from 1775 to 1783. His leadership was instrumental in leading the colonies to victory over Great Britain in the Revolutionary War. After the war, he retired to farm for a short period. In 1787, however, his interests in politics and the nation took him to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, where he was chosen to preside over the successful creation of the U.S. Constitution. After the Constitution was ratified, Washington was elected by 100% of the electoral college as the first president of the United States. Washington served two terms as president (1789–1793, 1793–1797); although he had the people's support, he chose not to serve a third term. He retired to Mount Vernon in 1797 and died there from pneumonia at the age of 67. At his funeral, one of his officers, Henry Lee, eulogized him as an American who was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the heart of his countrymen."

Traits and Characteristics

George Washington exhibited many special leadership traits (Brookhiser, 1996; Burns & Dunn, 2004; Fishman, 2001; Higginbotham, 2002). Researchers identify him as a modest man with great moral character who demonstrated integrity, virtuousness, and wisdom in his leadership. Though neither highly educated nor brilliant, he is reported to have read 10 newspapers each day. He was tall, and careful about his appearance. For much of his life, he kept a daily record of his work. Although reserved, as a military leader he was brave and tenacious. Rather than use power to his own ends, he gave up his position as commander in chief after the war. Washington provided stability, reason, and order after the American Revolution when the United States was in its formative stages. His evenness made him predictable to the American people, who considered him trustworthy. Above all, Washington was a prudent leader who made sound judgments and provided balance and wisdom to the new government. Washington was a special leader with many unique talents who, as Schwartz (1987, p. 147) has suggested, "was 'great' because he was 'good.'"



Walter Stoneman/Stringer/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Winston Churchill (1874–1965)

Winston Churchill was one of the greatest statesmen and orators of the 20th century. In addition, he was a talented painter and prolific writer; he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953. Churchill served in the military during World War I, became prime minister of Great Britain in May 1940, and remained in that office through World War II, until 1945. It was at this time that his masterful leadership was most visible. When the Germans threatened to invade Britain, Churchill stood strong. He made many famous speeches that had far-reaching effects on the morale of the people of Great Britain and the Allied forces. On the home front, he was a social reformer. He served a second term as prime minister from 1951 to 1955. He died at the age of 90 in 1965.

Traits and Characteristics

Winston Churchill's leadership was remarkable because it emerged from a man who was average in many respects and who faced challenges in his personal life. In his education, he did not stand out as superior to others. On a societal level, he was a loner who had few friends. On a personal level, he suffered from bouts of depression throughout his life. Despite these characteristics, Churchill emerged as a leader because of his other unique gifts and how he used them (Hayward, 1997; Keegan, 2002; Sandys & Littman, 2003). A voracious reader, Churchill was plain speaking, decisive, detail oriented, and informed (Hayward, 1997). Furthermore, he was very ambitious, but not out of self-interest: He wanted what was right for others, and he wanted the best for Great Britain. His most significant talent was his masterful use of language. In his oratory, the normally plainspoken Churchill used words and imagery in powerful ways that touched the

hearts of many and set the moral climate of the war (Keegan, 2002). He had the ability to build hope and inspire others to rise to the challenge. His stoicism and optimism were an inspiration to his people and all of the Allied forces (Sandys & Littman, 2003).

Mother Teresa (1910–1997)

A Roman Catholic nun considered a saint by many, Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her work with the poor and helpless in Kolkata, India, and throughout the world. Born in Macedonia, Mother Teresa came from a comfortable background. At the age of 18, she joined the Catholic Sisters of Loreto order and worked for 17 years as a high school teacher in Kolkata. Her awareness of poverty in Kolkata caused her to leave the convent in 1948 to devote herself to working full-time with the poorest of the poor in the slums of the city. In 1950, Mother Teresa founded a new religious order, the Missionaries of Charity, to care for the hungry, homeless, unwanted, and unloved.



Bettmann/Contributor/Bettmann/Getty Images

Today, there are more than 1 million workers affiliated with the Missionaries of Charity in more than 40 countries. The charity provides help to people who have been hurt by floods, epidemics, famines, and war. The Missionaries of Charity also operate hospitals, schools, orphanages, youth centers, shelters for the sick, and hospices. For her humanitarian work and efforts for peace, Mother Teresa has been recognized with many awards, including the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize (1971), the Nehru Award (1972), the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom (1985), and the Congressional Gold Medal (1994). Although she struggled with deteriorating health in her later years, Mother Teresa remained actively involved in her work to the very end. She died at the age of 87 in 1997. In September 2016, Pope Francis declared Mother Teresa a saint, with the official name of Saint Teresa of Kolkata. In a statement announcing the canonization, the Vatican called her a “metaphor for selfless devotion and holiness” (Lyman, 2016).

Traits and Characteristics

Mother Teresa was a simple woman of small stature who dressed in a plain blue and white sari, and who never owned more than the people she served. Mirroring her appearance, her mission was simple—to care for the poor. From her first year on the streets of Kolkata where she tended to one dying person to her last years when thousands of people were cared for by the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa stayed

focused on her goal. She was a true civil servant who was simultaneously determined and fearless, and humble and spiritual. She often listened to the will of God. When criticized for her stand on abortion and women's role in the family, or her approaches to eliminating poverty, Mother Teresa responded with a strong will; she never wavered in her deep-seated human values. Teaching by example with few words, she was a role model for others. Clearly, Mother Teresa was a leader who practiced what she preached (Gonzalez-Balado, 1997; Sebba, 1997; Spink, 1997; Vardey, 1995).

Bill Gates (1955–)

For many years, William (Bill) H. Gates III, cofounder and chair of Microsoft Corporation, the world's largest developer of software for personal computers, was the wealthiest person in the world with assets estimated at more than \$70 billion. A self-made man, Gates began his interest in computers at the age of 13 when he and a friend developed their first computer software program. He later attended Harvard University but left, without graduating, to focus on software development. He cofounded Microsoft in 1975. Under Gates's leadership, Microsoft developed the well-known Microsoft Disk Operating System (MS-DOS), Windows operating system, and Internet Explorer browser. Microsoft is one of the fastest-growing and most profitable companies ever established. From the success of Microsoft, Gates and his wife established the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000 to reduce inequities and improve lives around the world. This foundation promotes education, addresses global health issues (such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis), sponsors libraries, and supports housing and community initiatives in the Pacific Northwest. Beginning in 2006, Gates transitioned away from his day-to-day operating role at Microsoft to spend more time working with his foundation, but he remained the corporation's chair. But in February 2014, Gates stepped down as the company's board chairman in order to increase his involvement in the company's operations, serving in a new role of technology adviser and mentor to the company's new CEO Satya Nadella. Gates continues to tackle global challenges as co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has become the world's largest private charitable foundation.



Yamaguchi Haruyoshi/Contributor/Corbis Historical/Getty Images

Traits and Characteristics

Bill Gates is both intelligent and visionary. When he cofounded Microsoft, he had a vision about how to meet the technological needs of people in the future, and he hired friends to help him accomplish that vision. Gates is also task oriented and diligent, often working 12 or more hours a day to promote his interest in software product development. Furthermore, Gates is focused and aggressive. When Microsoft was accused by the U.S. government of antitrust violations, Gates appeared before congressional hearings and strongly defended his company. When asked about whether he has a “win at all cost” mentality, he answered that you bring people together to work on products and make products better, but there is never a finish line—there are always challenges ahead (Jager & Ortiz, 1997, pp. 151–152). In his personal style, Gates is simple, straightforward, unpretentious, and altruistic: He has demonstrated a strong concern for the poor and underserved.

Oprah Winfrey (1954–)

An award-winning television talk show host, Oprah Winfrey is one of the most powerful and influential women in the world. Born in rural Mississippi into a dysfunctional family, she was raised by her grandmother until she was 6. Winfrey learned to read at a very early age and skipped two grades in school. Her adolescent years were difficult: While living in inner-city Milwaukee with her mother who worked two jobs, Winfrey was molested by a family member. Despite these experiences, she was an honors student in high school and received national accolades for her oratory ability. She received a full scholarship to Tennessee State University, where she studied communication and worked at a local radio

station. Winfrey's work in the media eventually led her to Chicago where she became host of the highly acclaimed *Oprah Winfrey Show*. In 2007, Winfrey was the highest-paid entertainer in television, earning an annual salary estimated at \$260 million. She also is an actor, a producer, a book critic, and a magazine publisher; and, in 2011, left her successful television show to concentrate on her television network, OWN. For years, Winfrey had publicly battled her weight, using her struggles as inspiration for her millions of fans to lead healthier lives. In 2015, Winfrey became a 10% stockholder and board member of the diet empire Weight Watchers. Winfrey, who has long shown an interest in health issues and dieting programs, serves as an adviser to the company, using her undeniable clout to further encourage others to engage in healthier lifestyles.



Frederick M. Brown/Stringer/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images

Her total wealth is estimated at more than \$3.1 billion. Winfrey is also a highly regarded philanthropist: Her giving has focused on making a difference in the lives of the underprivileged and poor. Winfrey has paid special attention to the needs of people in Africa, raising millions of dollars to help AIDS-affected children there and creating a leadership academy for girls in a small town near Johannesburg, South Africa.

Traits and Characteristics

Oprah Winfrey's remarkable journey from rural poverty to influential world leader can be explained by several of her strengths (Harris & Watson, 2007; Illouz, 2003; McDonald, 2007). Foremost, Winfrey is an excellent communicator. Since she was a little girl reciting Bible passages in church, she has been comfortable in front of an audience. On television, she is able to talk to millions of people and have each

person feel as if she is talking directly to him or her. Winfrey is also intelligent and well read, with a strong business sense. She is sincere, determined, and inspirational. Winfrey has a charismatic style of leadership that enables her to connect with people. She is spontaneous and expressive, and has a fearless ability to self-disclose. Because she has “been in the struggle” and survived, she is seen as a role model. Winfrey has overcome many obstacles in her life and encourages others to overcome their struggles as well. Her message is a message of hope.

All of these individuals have exhibited exceptional leadership. While each of these leaders is unique, together they share many common characteristics. All are visionary, strong willed, diligent, and inspirational. As purpose-driven leaders, they are role models and symbols of hope. Reflecting on the characteristics of these extraordinary leaders will provide you with a better understanding of the traits that are important for effective leadership. Although you may not aspire to be another Bill Gates or Mother Teresa, you can learn a great deal from these leaders in understanding how your own traits affect your leadership.

Summary

This chapter describes the traits required of a leader. Social science research has provided insight into leadership traits. Thousands of leadership studies have been performed to identify the traits of effective leaders; the results of these studies point to a very long list of important leadership traits. From this list, the traits that appear to be especially important for effective leadership are *intelligence, confidence, charisma, determination, sociability, and integrity*.



Traits and Leadership Styles

From an examination of a select group of well-known historical and contemporary leaders including George Washington, Winston Churchill, Mother Teresa, Bill Gates, and Oprah Winfrey, it is clear that exemplary leaders exhibit many similar traits. In the main, these leaders were or are visionary, strong willed, diligent, inspirational, purpose driven, and hopeful. These leadership figures provide useful models for understanding the traits that are important and desirable for achieving effective leadership.

Because leadership is a complex process, there are no simple paths or guarantees to becoming a successful leader. Each individual is unique, and each of us has our own distinct talents for leadership. Those who are naturally strong in the six traits discussed in this chapter will be well equipped for leadership. If you are not strong on all of these traits but are willing to work on them, you can still become an effective leader.

Remember that there are many traits related to effective leadership. By becoming aware of your own traits and how to nourish them, you will be well on your way to becoming a successful leader.

Glossary Terms

charisma
confidence
determination
integrity
intelligence
sociability



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Application

2.1 Case Study: An Emerging Leader

Tim T. portrays his life as a tension between “nature” and “nurture.” He sees it this way: He has two sets of DNA, and these two very different sets of characteristics have given him what he needs to be a leader. The first set of DNA, he says, comprises those “God-given genetic talents” that came from the biological parents who abandoned him at birth. The second set comes from the religious and caring family who adopted him two years later.

Tim’s nature is to be out in front of people and relating to them. These innate abilities of his have always been very public and people oriented: from his easy and eloquent speaking style and teaching skills to singing and acting. “As a baby, I was always an extrovert, and since age 2 or 3, people have told me that I would be either president of the United States, a preacher, or a comedian,” he says. “I didn’t intentionally work on these abilities; I have just always had them.”

His “other strand of DNA” came from his adoptive family whom he describes as gentle, unassuming, and quiet. Tim admits he ran in the “middle of the crowd,” while his family members were often silent bystanders standing off in a corner. They did, however, instill in him the strong values of “loving God, loving family, working hard, and giving back” that he embraces today.

Those two sets of characteristics allowed Tim to thrive early. Just out of high school, he was given an opportunity by baseball player Derek Jeter’s Turn 2 Foundation to create a new after-school program for second to fifth graders called Proud to Be Me. The goal of the pilot program was to build children’s self-esteem and self-concept by providing them with new and diverse experiences. Tim developed it with the goal of giving these children a larger lens of what the world could be, so they would be empowered to see more choices than what they found in their neighborhoods.

“My core belief and approach has been to help others by giving them things that nobody can take away,” he says.

When Tim went to college, he supported himself working part-time at a bank doing collections, calling people on the phone to try to convince them to make payments on their debts. It wasn’t fun, but Tim excelled at it. “I would use my powers of persuasion to get people to make payments, not because it was my job, but because I wanted to help them. These weren’t bad people; they just got in over their heads.”

It was in this job that Tim realized his talents only worked if there was a purpose. “I tried to sell vacuum cleaners once and couldn’t even sell one to my own mama,” he says. “Do you know why? Because there was no purpose in it. But yet, I could talk these people who are struggling and hurting into making a payment. That’s when I knew that I can’t walk on the face of this earth and not help somebody. My persuasion has to have a purpose.”

After finishing college, Tim went on to get a master’s degree in communication and, at the age of 28, became the executive director of the Douglass Community Association, a 90-year-old private, nonprofit, inner-city agency that provides opportunities for youth development, education, healthy living, and leadership. Tim managed the center’s \$1.2 million budget and 24

people. He spent much of his time out in the larger community raising money and resources and putting out fires. Although Tim enjoyed his role as executive director, he admits he had difficulty handling the day-to-day personnel issues at the agency.

“I spent a lot of time managing external human resources, but not paying attention to the needs of internal human resources at the center. When my staff did an assessment of me, they consistently said, ‘He does a great job as a leader, but he is our boss and we need him here.’”

To enhance his skills, he took advanced leadership training at the Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina and Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Tim left the community center after four years to become an associate vice president at Southwest Michigan First, a regional agency focused on catalyzing job creation and economic growth in an area that has been hard hit by job losses. For Tim, it’s an opportunity that makes the most of his double set of DNA.

“This is the place where my talent and my passions meet. I can help people. I can sift through problems and take big issues and break them down in ways people understand. I can persuade and motivate people and organizations to grow,” he says. “And I am still helping others in ways that people can’t take away.”

But Tim still wants to find more ways to help others by creating an independent foundation to help people and kids in need. “My experience has been that it is hard to help hurting people because there is so much bureaucracy and BS tied up in how we do it. I want to help people without strings. If you give people money to help them, don’t give it to them if you need it back. If you’re gonna do something for someone, just do it.”

Questions

1. What is your reaction to Tim’s story?
2. Nature and nurture play a significant role in Tim’s leadership journey. From your perspective, which has the greatest impact on Tim? Discuss your answer.
3. Of the six major traits described in the chapter (i.e., intelligence, confidence, charisma, determination, sociability, and integrity), which traits are Tim’s strongest, and which traits are his weakest?
4. What characteristics of Tim’s leadership would you like to incorporate into your own style of leadership?

2.2 Leadership Traits Questionnaire

Purpose

1. To gain an understanding of how traits are used in leadership assessment
2. To obtain an assessment of your own leadership traits

Directions

1. Make five copies of this questionnaire. It should be completed by you and five people you know (e.g., roommates, coworkers, relatives, friends).

2. Using the following scale, have each individual indicate the degree to which he or she agrees or disagrees with each of the 14 statements below regarding your leadership traits. Do not forget to complete this exercise for yourself.
3. _____ (your name) is

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Articulate: Communicates effectively with others	1	2	3	4	5
2. Perceptive: Is discerning and insightful	1	2	3	4	5
3. Self-confident: Believes in oneself and one's ability	1	2	3	4	5
4. Self-assured: Is secure with self, free of doubts	1	2	3	4	5
5. Persistent: Stays fixed on the goals, despite interference	1	2	3	4	5
6. Determined: Takes a firm stand, acts with certainty	1	2	3	4	5
7. Trustworthy: Is authentic, inspires confidence	1	2	3	4	5
8. Dependable: Is consistent and reliable	1	2	3	4	5
9. Friendly: Shows kindness and warmth	1	2	3	4	5
10. Outgoing: Talks freely, gets along well with others	1	2	3	4	5
11. Conscientious: Is thorough, organized, and careful	1	2	3	4	5
12. Diligent: Is industrious, hardworking	1	2	3	4	5
13. Sensitive: Shows tolerance, is tactful and sympathetic	1	2	3	4	5
14. Empathic: Understands others, identifies with others	1	2	3	4	5

Scoring

1. Enter the responses for Raters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in the appropriate columns on the scoring sheet on this page. An example of a completed chart is provided on page 41.
2. For each of the 14 items, compute the average for the five raters and place that number in the "average rating" column.
3. Place your own scores in the "self-rating" column.

Leadership Traits Questionnaire Chart

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Rater 4	Rater 5	Average rating	Self-rating
1. Articulate							
2. Perceptive							
3. Self-confident							
4. Self-assured							
5. Persistent							
6. Determined							
7. Trustworthy							
8. Dependable							
9. Friendly							
10. Outgoing							
11. Conscientious							
12. Diligent							
13. Sensitive							
14. Empathic							

Summary and interpretation:
Summary and interpretation:

Scoring Interpretation

The scores you received on this questionnaire provide information about how you see yourself and how others see you as a leader. The chart allows you to see where your perceptions are the same as those of others and where they differ. There are no “perfect” scores for this questionnaire. The purpose of the instrument is to provide a way to assess your strengths and weaknesses and to evaluate areas where your perceptions are similar to or different from those of others. While it is confirming when others see you in the same way as you see yourself, it is also beneficial to know when they see you differently. This assessment can help you understand your assets as well as areas in which you may seek to improve.

Example 2.1 Leadership Traits Questionnaire Ratings

	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3	Rater 4	Rater 5	Average rating	Self-rating
1. Articulate	4	4	3	2	4	3.4	4
2. Perceptive	2	5	3	4	4	3.6	5
3. Self-confident	4	4	5	5	4	4.4	4
4. Self-assured	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
5. Persistent	4	4	3	3	3	3.4	3
6. Determined	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
7. Trustworthy	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
8. Dependable	4	5	4	5	4	4.4	4
9. Friendly	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
10. Outgoing	5	4	5	4	5	4.6	4
11. Conscientious	2	3	2	3	3	2.6	4
12. Diligent	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
13. Sensitive	4	4	5	5	5	4.6	3
14. Empathic	5	5	4	5	4	4.6	3

Summary and interpretation: The scorer's self-ratings are higher than the average ratings of others on articulate, perceptive, conscientious, and diligent. The scorer's self-ratings are lower than the average ratings of others on self-confident, persistent, dependable, outgoing, sensitive, and empathic. The scorer's self-ratings on self-assured, determined, trustworthy, and friendly are the same as the average ratings of others.

Summary and interpretation: The scorer's self-ratings are higher than the average ratings of others on articulate, perceptive, conscientious, and diligent. The scorer's self-ratings are lower than the average ratings of others on self-confident, persistent, dependable, outgoing, sensitive, and empathic. The scorer's self-ratings on self-assured, determined, trustworthy, and friendly are the same as the average ratings of others.

Improve Your Leadership Skills

If you have the interactive eBook version of this text, log in to access the interactive leadership assessment. After completing this chapter's questionnaire, you will receive individualized feedback and practical suggestions for further strengthening your leadership based on your responses in this questionnaire.

2.3 Observational Exercise

Leadership Traits

Purpose

1. To gain an understanding of the role of traits in the leadership process
2. To examine the traits of selected historical and everyday leaders

Directions

1. Based on the descriptions of the historical leaders provided in the chapter, identify the three major leadership traits for each of the leaders listed below.
2. Select and briefly describe two leaders in your own life (e.g., work supervisor, teacher, coach, music director, business owner, community leader). Identify the

three major leadership traits of each of these leaders.

Historical leaders The leader's three major traits

George Washington 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Winston Churchill 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Mother Teresa 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Bill Gates 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Oprah Winfrey 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Everyday leaders

Leader #1 _____

Brief description _____

Traits 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Leader #2 _____

Brief description _____

Traits 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Questions

1. Based on the leaders you observed, which leadership traits appear to be most important?
2. What differences, if any, did you observe between the historical and everyday leaders' traits?
3. Based on your observations, what one trait would you identify as the definitive leadership trait?
4. Overall, what traits do you think should be used in selecting our society's leaders?

2.4 Reflection and Action Worksheet

Leadership Traits

Reflection

1. Based on the scores you received on the Leadership Traits Questionnaire, what are your strongest leadership traits? What are your weakest traits? Discuss.
2. In this chapter, we discussed five leadership figures. As you read about these leaders, which leaders did you find most appealing? What was it about their leadership that you found remarkable? Discuss.
3. As you reflect on your own leadership traits, do you think some of them are more “you” and authentic than others? Have you always been the kind of leader you are today, or have your traits changed over time? Are you a stronger leader today than you were five years ago? Discuss.

Action

1. If you could model yourself after one or more of the historical leaders we discussed in this chapter, whom would you model yourself after? Identify two of their traits that you could and should incorporate into your own style of leadership.
2. Based on the case study of Tim T., which of his traits could you incorporate into your own leadership? Discuss.
3. Although changing leadership traits is not easy, which of your leadership traits would you like to change? Specifically, what actions do you need to take to change your traits?
4. All of us have problematic traits that inhibit our leadership but are difficult to change. Which single trait distracts from your leadership? Since you cannot easily change this trait, what actions can you take to “work around” this trait? Discuss.



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