Lesson 4: The Traits of a Leader

**Introduction**

A good leader must have good character. However, though good character may describe a whole set of characteristics required for leadership, there is even more required of a leader than good character. For example you can have good character and still be lacking in vision. You may be faithful and pure in motive, word and deed, yet unskilled.

So while we are looking at the character traits of a leader we intend to go further and consider a broader view of what is required in order to lead effectively.

In this lesson we will look at twelve traits of a leader. This list is by no means exhaustive, but rather serves as a general set of necessary characteristics.

## Skill and character of a leader.

# A Leader has Vision

We have considered this much already. Nevertheless, I mention it here again. Vision sits high in the list of leadership traits. Without vision you will be going nowhere. Perhaps you will go nowhere slowly, perhaps swiftly. You cannot lead without vision.

A leader is not a janitor. You are not called to keep the status quo but to bring change, to build something or grow something, or move something forward.

A leader is a pioneer, dissatisfied with things the way they are and carrying a holy discontent – a kind of calling – wanting something to be made better. Consider Moses and Nehemiah, Joshua, David, Gideon. Each of these men saw something and set out to achieve it.

A leader sees opportunity where others see obstacles. The spies that were sent to explore Canaan brought a mixed report. Like Joshua and Caleb, a true leader brings a good report – one made of reality and faith – not just a rational assessment, but a report that is mixed with redemptive words.

* Exercise: Can you, in relation to some field that you care about, write down what is wrong with the status quo and what you want to see change? What can you do about this?

# A Leader has Courage

It is not enough to have vision. Many people have great ideas and a noble vision, but without courage no action will take place. Almost any right vision will require courage to achieve. Anything good will be opposed by the enemy and our own fears and sense of inadequacy. Moses, when called by God, said he could not speak.

The courage required is an inner courage. It is true bravery and not bravado. In many cases it is not seen. The leader simply does what is required because of a strong conviction.

*“Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me.”*

*– Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms*

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is taking action in spite of fear.

Leadership will require courage. You may be quaking in your boots, but you continue toward your convictions.

It is reassuring to know God is there. As a leader you may choose to take courage in God, or quake in your boots alone.

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).*

# A Leader takes Initiative

*“If not you, then who?” – said someone.*

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8).*

*Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6).*

A leader needs to “do something!” – bringing ideas, solutions, creativity, and innovation. A good leader is able to start something, and should not be just a good starter, but someone who can continue to build faithfully and strategically. A leader should also be able to get others on board. This is requires envisioning and inspiring and recruiting others to the cause.

“Just do it!” - Nike

# A Leader is Consistent

Good leadership requires diligence and consistency. We could describe this as a “long obedience in the same direction” (Eugene Peterson). This is a very important component of leadership as it has a direct influence on how easy it is for others to follow.

Leaders that are up and down, fast and slow, turning this way and that make it difficult for people to gain traction and momentum with them.

Leaders that are capricious (lacking in steadiness in purpose and devotion, impulsive and unpredictable) make their leadership emotionally tiring to those they lead.

If a leader’s mood changes with the weather and they use their mood to set the “emotional temperature of a meeting” they can unintentionally put distance between themselves and those they lead. The result is they become unapproachable.

*“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

*But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (James 1:4-8).*

# A Leader is Committed

There is no costless leadership. Leaders who lead from the front and lead by example are willing to pay a price. This kind of leadership is demonstrated as the context requires – in marriage it may mean putting the other person first, or in hosting it could mean providing the bulk of the care, or in serving it perhaps means arriving first and leaving last.

The greater the price paid, the greater the value of what we build. In this sense commitment is the key to great treasure. Without commitment nothing of great value is ever achieved or obtained.

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

*The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (John 10:11-13).*

# A Leader has Integrity

Integrity is a beautiful concept. It comes has within it the idea of “one” – meaning unity and indivisibility. There are no cracks, no faults; there is wholeness.

A leader must have integrity in his character. He should carry no hidden agenda, and no masks and deceptions. He must be whole-hearted, single-minded and trustworthy.

*The money brought into the temple was not spent for making silver basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, trumpets or any other articles of gold or silver for the temple of the LORD; it was paid to the workmen, who used it to repair the temple.*

*They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty.*

*The money from the guilt offerings and sin offerings was not brought into the temple of the LORD; it belonged to the priests (2 Kings 12:13-16).*

# A Leader takes Responsibility

There are many ways in which a leader can show he or she takes responsibility. They should demonstrate the qualities they seek to develop in others:

* + Hard working
  + Going the extra mile
  + Having an eye for detail
  + Completing tasks with excellence

And if things are not the way they should be, a leader should “shoulder the blame.” In a real sense, the leader acknowledges things are the way they are as a result of his or her leadership.

* Example: My marriage is what I have made it.

A leader must learn to shoulder the blame, as did David:

*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge (Psalm 51:3-4).*

A leader has an attitude of “the buck stops with me” – taking responsibility for mistakes, failures and faults. A leader doesn’t shift the blame, or make excuses.

*“When you are wrong, take it on the chin.” -* Ashley Bell

* Extra Study: 1 Samuel 15:1-30. Saul denies his disobedience. He claims he did what was asked. He puts responsibility on the soldiers and tries to justify himself. Finally he admits he sinned, but it is too late.

# A Leader is able to Manage

Being a manager may not be the leader’s ultimate dream, but management is a very real aspect of good leadership. A leader must perform self-management and people-management. This requires self-discipline and people skills.

With self-management, the key skills needed are good time-management and good management of one’s own energy levels. A leader must know their capacity and ensure they know what pace to maintain in order to run the race well.

When working with people, a leader should develop their emotional intelligence.

A definition from an internet article:

*Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others. It is generally said to include three skills: emotional awareness; the ability to harness emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving; and the ability to manage emotions, which includes regulating your own emotions and cheering up or calming down other people.1*

As a leader you are leading people, so be careful not to produce robots and rebels, by leading in an authoritarian / dictatorial way.

* Develop empathy. This is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and see things from another’s perspective.
* Become approachable: Availability not aloofness (approachable)
* Learn how to motivate by invitation and inspiration, not firstly by threats.
* Take great care to manage the expectations of others.
* Be strong to set boundaries and say no, while putting effort into not offending.
* Be slow and thoughtful in how you delegate. Who you pick for a team requires learning to read people, being sensitive to the Holy Spirit and getting perspective from others.
* Become a relentless encourager.

# A Leader Perseveres

Leadership is a long journey. At times it may be discouraging, both personally and for those you lead. These qualities of perseverance will help a leader in becoming more than a good starter:

* A leader is tenacious. Like a dog with a bone – never letting go.
* A leader is resilient. You may get knocked down, but you keep getting back up.
* A leader is thick skinned. You must resist taking offense. Rather be like a duck – and let the offense be like water which flows off a duck’s back.

# A Leader Communicates

Because leaders need to impart vision, give direction and resolve conflict, good communication skills are essential. A leader needs to envision others in a winsome way. Those who are well lead feel a sense of ownership and inclusion in the vision.

A leader needs to give clear directions:

*Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? (1 Corinthians 14:8).*

Another area where good communication is essential is in conflict resolution. Leaders should be able to settle disputes and unite hearts and minds. Such a leader is a peacemaker.

Communicating well is not about always having to be right. However, leadership requires that we able to defend the truth, and hold fast to the core values – and this includes refuting opponents.

A skilful leader develops the ability to teach others. We should not just ‘tell people’ but empower people with an understanding of whatever mission is involved.

*“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).*

*“Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,” (1 Timothy 3:2).*

*“And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).*

# A Leader is Respectful

Humility is a requirement for a servant leader. When we recognise that all people are made in the image of God, it leads us to honour even those is a weaker position or very different from us. A leader should show respect to all, irrespective of different positions and roles.

*“See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young”* (*Isaiah 40:10-11).*

*“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7).*

# A Leader is Hope-filled

*“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be’” (Romans 4:18).*

As a leader you carry the burden of maintaining hope, even in some situations that may seem very bleak. A leader must learn to think optimistically. It helps to factor God into your life equation. When you know God is working things for good, one can speak redemptively into every situation.

*“A leader is a relentless encourager”* - Peter Howard-Browne.

*“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement)” (Acts 4:36).*

Leaders must not just carry hope themselves, but must convey that hope to others. This means being an encourager, seeking to impart hope and confidence to others.

**Questions on Module One, Lesson Four**

1. Why is it necessary for a leader to have skill as well as good character?
2. Is it possible to develop the characteristics above? In what ways are you developing them in your life?
3. Choose one of the above traits and explain how not having this trait will affect the success of a leader.

These questions can be answered online at:

<http://www.tanacitychurch.mg/foundations-of-leadership.html>

Alternatively, write your name and answer the questions on this page.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Answers: