

You Too Can Be a Leader by Acquiring Leadership Traits

Dr. Paresh Chandra Mohanty¹, Meena Nayak²

¹Director Talent Sigma Professionals Pvt. Ltd, Corporate Trainer.

²Corporate & Soft Skill Trainer, Communication Expert

Abstract: Since long many have believed in trait theory of leadership – differentiating leaders from non-leaders, by focusing on personal qualities and characteristics that are claimed to be acquired by birth. In other words, believers of trait theory say – leaders are born. They are born with some specific qualities called “traits” that make them leaders, and those who are not born with those traits can never be leaders. Modern research on leadership has disproved such claim. Leaders are not necessarily born. They are made. By observing and analyzing leaders in various organizations, and scanning through research literatures on leadership traits, an effort is made to identify some common traits in established leaders in organizations. This article is intended to sensitize the aspired organizational or business leaders on acquiring those common qualities or traits that will sharpen their leadership skills and help them emerge as leaders. The traits suggested are – ambition, desire to lead, multiple intelligence, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, job relevant knowledge and flexibility which can be acquired to be a leader.

I. INTRODUCTION

Researchers have proved that leaders have made differences in organisation’s performance. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (1985) claimed, “A business short on capital can borrow money and one with a poor location can move. But a business short on leadership has little chance for survival”. Leaders are born or made? It has been debated since long. But researchers found that certain characteristics or traits in a leader differentiate him from non-leaders. And certain core traits significantly contribute to business leaders’ success. What are those core traits? A review of 20 different studies identified nearly 80 leadership traits, but only five of those traits were common to four or more of the investigations, found J.G. Geier(1967). If the search was intended to identify a set of traits that would always differentiate leaders from non-leaders and effective from ineffective leaders, the search is still on. However some researchers, like S.A.Kirkpatrick and E.A. Locke(1991) on leadership traits have confirmed that few leadership traits are common in most business leaders and if one has not inherited them from birth can acquire through practice.

II. SEVEN TRAITS THAT MAKE YOU A LEADER

1. Ambition: Management history is full of examples, where people with high ambitions have become great leaders.

“Ambition is the driving motive that propels us to reach beyond what is considered possible. Ambition fuels creativity, design thinking, and an entrepreneurial spirit, and is therefore a powerful leadership quality” says Joan Marques (2017). Leaders have relatively a high desire for achievement. They always have a desire to get ahead of other colleagues. To stay ahead they show their drive and determination, set hard and challenging goals for self and the organization. It is found that ambition leads to creativity and innovation. Ambition reflects a healthy self-esteem and higher power of abstraction and visualization of the future. An ambitious Indra Nyoyi had a dogged determination to succeed and became the CEO of Pepsi. Bill Gates has an in exhaustible ambition to see a laptop on each desk of the professionals in the world and today we see the mighty Microsoft organization. Ambition inspires a person to set a vision / goal and continuously pursue it to be a leader.

2. Desire to Lead: This is about a preference to be in leadership rather than sub-ordinate role. It is the willingness to assume responsibility, influence people and being an authority. “These are the people, who have a powerful competitive drive for a position, authority, need to be recognized, to influence”, said Jon Bentz (1990), a psychologist. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (1985)said, “A leader must want to get power to exercise dominance influence over others”. David McClelland(1961) found such need for power with “socialized power motive” (desire to lead) required to achieve organizational vision by developing network, coalitions, gain cooperation from others, resolve conflict in a manner, and use role modeling to influence others in opposite to “personalized power motive” (power lust). Robert Greenleaf’s(1970) “Servant Leadership” concept reveals how people decide to lead in wake of their intention to serve followers. Because leading is not easy, one should have a desire to lead. Most employees who have gone to the leadership position have acquired and developed this trait.

3. Multiple Intelligence: When we talk about intelligence, in recent days, we just not talk about IQ or cognitive intelligence. A host of other intelligences are identified to combine with IQ to succeed as a leader.

i) Cognitive Intelligence: This is about a person’s reasoning abilities. Written examinations in job selection process assess

candidates' IQ. Philip Kotler (2014) talks about a "keen mind"- analytical ability, good judgment, capacity to think strategically and multi dimensionally. The followers' perception about the cognitive ability of a leader is a source of authority, in the leadership relationship.

ii) Emotional Intelligence: The trait research demonstrates that leaders need basic intelligence and job-relevant knowledge. "But IQ and technical skills are threshold capabilities. They are necessary but not sufficient requirements for leadership", says S. P. Robbins(2011). It is the possession of Emotional Intelligence: the ability to identify, understand and manage emotions of self and others helps a leader to get connected to the followers. The five components suggested by Daniel Goleman(1995) the founder of EI are- Self- awareness; Self regulation, Self motivation, Empathy and Social Skills. In a research of fortune 500 companies, by Daniel Goleman when star performers were compared with average ones in leadership positions nearly 90 percent of the difference in their effectiveness was attributed to Emotional Intelligence factors rather than IQ or basic intelligence. The need is to remain even-tempered, exited while communicating but not enraged, and able to resolve inter-personal conflict.

4. Honesty & Integrity: A leader is closely observed by his followers. He should walk the talk. That is integrity-integration between the talk and deed. Honesty towards work and assignment builds trust with people. And once trust is built, followers are ready to do it all for the leader. That makes the path clear for the leader for smooth passage. That also involves followers in the process. And the leader achieves his goal with the help of followers. Three researchers Professor James Kouzes, Barry Posner and W.H. Schmidt(1995) asked 1500 managers in AT&T, what values do you look for and admire in your superiors? "Honesty and Integrity in him, being truthful and trustworthy and having character and having conviction" was the most frequently mentioned characteristics. "We are willing to follow someone who is worthy of our trust. That he is honest, ethical and principled", they answered. Be honest and have integrity.

5. Self-Confidence: Leading is a difficult job. It requires solving varied problems, take numerous decisions, followers are to be convinced, setbacks to be overcome, risks are to be taken in the face of uncertainties. A person riddled with self-doubt cannot lead, because he cannot be trusted. A self confident person arouses followers' confidence. Whether confident people achieve success or success makes people confident is a riddle. But we all know confidence comes from small successes. Take small projects. Complete them with due diligence. With each success will pile up layers of confidence. It increases the belief in the person that he can perform. When Rajiv Bajaj took over Bajaj Auto and decided to stop production of Bajaj Scooter and go for Motor Cycle production, even his father Rahul Bajaj opposed. Because

Bajaj Scooter was "Desh Ki Dhadkan" and it was impossible to stop production of "Hamara Bajaj" and to replace it with a bike. But Rajiv was confident. He said, "Bharat is changing, Buland is changing and Bajaj is changing". Rajiv was confident about the positive outcome. And today, Bajaj Pulsar is the road King in two-wheeler market.

6. Job- relevant knowledge: A leader is required to understand his responsibility by knowing about the organization and the work. That is possible only when he knows clearly and distinctly about the job to be tackled in the organization. Ultimately the followers look for guidance from the leader and an ignorant leader can never guide. Jack Welch of General Electric (GE) fame took over the falling company in the year 1981. He had the mastery on the GE's production lines, competitors' strategy and how to turn public perception in favour of GE. His officials were impressed with solutions they received from Jack to their confronting problems and found in him true leadership. Interesting it is seen that formal education is not a must to have job-relevant knowledge. Only 40% of business leaders studied by Bennis and Nanus(1985) had business degrees. In-depth knowledge of organizations and industry allows effective leaders to make well informed decisions and to understand the implications of those decisions.

7. Flexibility: This is about adjusting with changing circumstances. A single style of leadership may not work everywhere. Research says based on maturity level of followers leadership style should change. A leader should have the ability to change his plans to match the reality of the situation. As a result, he maintains productivity during transitions or periods of chaos. A Leader who is ready to embrace change, is open to new ideas, and can work with a wide spectrum of people has more chance of succeeding than a rigid one. Russi Modi was a highly successful leader in TISCO. After retirement from Tata Group he was conferred with the responsibility to head the loss making Air India. Modi tried to implement his success principles of TISCO days at a government unit and could not succeed. In the process Modi was frustrated and ultimately resigned from Air India. Why couldn't he succeed? Because he refused to change his leadership style of working in a private sector, which was not accepted by followers in government sector. A leader has to understand situational variables, followers' level of maturity and be ready to change his leadership style to be effective.

III. TO CONCLUDE

The chairman of a PSU bank in India recently said, "we have 43,000 officers, but not getting 9500 branch managers out of them to lead the branches. It is not an isolated case. Most organizations are facing this problem because leadership traits are not acquired by many. Leaders are different from non-leaders because of the traits discussed above. Researchers have proved that leaders are not born with such traits, they are acquired gradually. And such traits as discussed above -

ambition, desire to lead, multiple intelligence, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, job relevant knowledge and flexibility all can be acquired by an employee to move to a leadership position. Those who feel that they lack some traits should try to acquire them and practice to bloom as a leader.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bennis W.G. and Nanus B. (1985) , “ Leaders: the strategies for taking charge, *Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc. 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022*
- [2] Bentz, V. J. (1990). Contextual issues in predicting high-level leadership performance: Contextual richness as a criterion consideration in personality research with executives. *In K. E. Clark & M. B. Clark (Eds.), Measures of leadership (p. 131–143). Leadership Library of America.ork, Harper and Row*
- [3] Geier,J.G. (1967), A Trait Approach to the Study of Leadership in Small groups” *Journal of Communication , pp.316-323 .*
- [4] Goleman D. (1995)“ Emotional Intelligence”, *Bantam Books*
- [5] Greenleaf R.K. , “ The Servant Leadership” (1970) penguinrandomhouse.com
- [6] Kirkpatrick S.A. and Locke E.A. (1991) , “ Leadership: Do Traits Matter” ? *Academy of Management Executive , vol.5, No.2 pp 48-60*
- [7] Kouzes J.M. and Posner B.Z. (1995) “ The Leadership Challenge: How to get things done in organizations, *sanfrancisco, Jossey Bass Publications.*
- [8] Kotler P. (2014), *The Mind of a Leaders Legends , Audio book*
- [9] Marques J,(2017)” Leadership Today: Practices for Personal and Professional Performance” *Woodbury University, Burbank, CA. USA (pp.353-370)*
- [10] McClelland D.C. (1961) “ Motivation Need Theory, The Achieving Society”
- [11] Robbins S.P. ,(2011), “ Organizational Behaviour” , *Pearson Education pp. 345*