

Five Qualities of a Lasting Leader

These five qualities are gifts that true leaders give freely to others.

By Barry Banther



Leadership isn't something you do, it's something you acquire. But becoming a leader requires a personal transformation, not just a personal agenda. "Roger" hadn't learned that lesson.

During an interview for a new leadership position, the hiring manager asked Roger why he switched jobs—and sometimes companies—every three to five years. Roger blamed the employees who stopped growing, and he doubted owner-

ship's commitment to the goal he was asked to reach. In other words, it had to be the environment that prompted him to move on because Roger was a "good" manager.

Roger was half right: it was the environment. But he failed to recognize that he was responsible for creating that environment.

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it's something you acquire.**

Lasting leaders, those who can weather economic downturns and even seismic market shifts in their employees or customers, know how to assemble a diverse team and bring out the very best in its members. If you're not building relationships with your associates that will stand the test of time, your

success—including your financial success—will be short-lived.

If we want to understand what really defines leaders, we must start by looking at their followers.

The old tricks meant to motivate employees to work hard and to help achieve the organization’s mission no longer work. Employees have become jaded by broken promises and failed dreams. Today, followers are drawn to leaders who show openness, invest their time, listen, encourage, and show appreciation for the strengths their employees bring to work. Those qualities are developed intentionally over time, but they pay dividends in both financial and personal performance for a lifetime.

Followers are drawn to leaders who show openness.

Leaders who are held in the highest esteem for their success both on the bottom line and with the people they lead are described by their followers by such phrases as “He was always there for me,” “I felt like she really listened,” and “He valued my opinion.” Those qualities are gifts that a lasting leader is willing to give freely to others.

1. Being Open to Others

Every leader claims to have an open-door policy. But it’s not a leader’s door that needs to be open; it’s an open mind that matters. Openness encourages employee engagement, and that is fundamental to business success. The Gallup Organization’s study of employee engagement in 7,939 business units in 36 different companies found that employee engagement was positively associated with performance (Harter, Schmidt, and Keyes 2002).

2. Investing Time in Others

Leaders are usually not solo inventors or lonely creative thinkers.

They are called to assemble a team of people and to empower them to be more productive together than any of them could be alone. Leaders can’t create time, but when they

can’t do quality work for more than a few minutes without hope—the hope that their work matters, the hope that they can get the job done, and the hope that their efforts will



invest their time to build profitable relationships with their employees, they multiply the results they can achieve. Choosing to spend time with his or her employees daily is a leader’s best return on time.

3. Listening to Others

Trust between leaders and their associates is built on a transparency that reflects a freedom to speak and be heard. It’s been estimated that as much as 55% of a leader’s work time is spent listening. But most leaders don’t know how to do that. They confuse listening with hearing. When we are open to an employee’s ideas, and we invest the time in listening to them, we are more apt to understand what they are saying and, sometimes more important, what they are not saying.

4. Offering Encouragement to Others

Employees can work for hours without food or water, but they

be appreciated by their boss. As a leader, you have few chances to show respect for employees that are more potent than surprising them with words that demonstrate that you believe they have what it takes to get the job done despite their current challenges.

5. Expressing Appreciation for Others’ Abilities

When a leader expresses genuine appreciation, it is mirrored in employees’ improved attitudes, stronger commitment, and better performance. Study after study documents that employees do not feel appreciated. The gift of appreciation is not about altering associates’ opinion of the leader; it’s about changing their opinion of themselves. When a leader helps employees believe in their unique strengths, they build an environment that works! Lasting leaders know how to bring out the best in others.

High-Demand Leadership

You can be appointed someone's boss, but not their leader. Your followers ultimately determine your leadership. Had Roger developed those five gifts, he might still have changed jobs every three to five years—not because he could no longer get results but because he had developed a reputation for building a high-performance team that followed his leadership even under tough conditions. That kind of leader is always in high demand.

Reference

Harter, J. K., F. L. Schmidt, and C. L. Keyes. 2002. Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: A review of the Gallup studies. In *Flourishing: The positive person and the good life*, ed. C. L. Keyes and J. Haidt, pp. 205–44. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.



Barry Banther is the founder and CEO of Banther Consulting (www.barrybanther.com) and the author of *A Leader's Gift: How to Earn the Right to*

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