

7 Inspiring Leaders and the Traits That Made Them Great

John Maxwell says everything rises and falls based on leadership. I agree.

But leadership was not something taught when I went to the University of Florida. I've had to learn it the hard way, mostly by trial and error. Here are seven traits of leadership I've learned by watching leaders who exhibited them:

1. Vision. This is the ability to see the future. The Bible says without vision, the people perish. I've learned to focus on one thing and simply work in that direction when I didn't have any idea what to do. Somehow, a way is found.

A man who exhibits this as well as any I've known is Tommy Barnett, who built Phoenix First Assembly of God from a handful of people to one of the greatest churches in America. Tommy's attitude is, "You can't think of a ministry we don't want to include in our church—and by the way, you're the new leader." This has resulted in hundreds of leaders and one of the healthiest churches I've ever seen. I remember when he had a vision to start a multicultural ministry in Los Angeles. That has developed into the Dream Center that is headed by his son, Matthew, and has spawned others across the country. But the Dream Center began as a vision with Tommy Barnett.

2. Problem-solving. Leadership is more than a huge idealistic vision. A leader must also have problem-solving skills. No matter what you do, problems develop, and it's up to the leader to figure out what's wrong and to fix it. I know of no one better at problem-solving than Dr. Mark Rutland, whose book *ReLaunch* I recently read. I highly recommend it, and here's where you can purchase it. Mark has wonderful word pictures for diagnosing problems. When nothing happens, he

says the gears have rusted shut and the leader must grease them to get them moving. (I've used that one this week to deal with something in my own organization.)

At other times Mark describes the leader as the air traffic controller that decides which planes to land now and which ones to keep circling until there's time and money to let them land. He proved he could solve problems by turning around Calvary Assembly in Orlando and Southeastern College (now Southeastern University) and by later helping lead the transition at Oral Roberts University during a difficult time.

3. Constant growth. A leader must constantly grow. Of course, we know that healthy things grow. An organization can't grow, however, unless it's healthy and the leader is also growing. Change in this world is constant due to technology. In a culture that seems to be shifting beneath our feet, a leader must grow.

One of the best people at personifying constant growth is Mike Huckabee—the son of an Arkansas fire fighter. Huckabee became a Baptist preacher and then got involved in politics because he was concerned about what the liberals in government were doing in his state. Through a series of events, he was elected lieutenant governor when Bill Clinton was elected president of the United States, and then became governor when Jim Guy Tucker was forced to step down due to the Whitewater scandal. He was elected two more times. If you read his books—and I've read them all—he tells how he had to constantly grow and change.

Finally, he ran for president and, like Barack Obama, surprised everyone when he won the Iowa caucus. He has one of the most successful television programs on Fox News. I enjoy watching him every weekend—it helps me keep in touch with what he's doing, and I can see how he is still growing as a person, a leader and a spokesman for Christian values.

4. Motivation and communication. A leader must be able to motivate. That's what gets people to follow. You aren't a leader unless someone is following. You must be able to communicate in such a way it motivates people to do what must be done for the vision to be realized.

One of the best motivators/communicators is Robert Morris of Gateway Church in Dallas. His church is constantly growing. In only 14 years, it's grown to an average Sunday attendance of 27,000. (On Resurrection Sunday, the attendance was 50,679.) The Kings University recently moved to Gateway, which has ministries too numerous to mention here. There are many reasons why Gateway has grown, but one reason is that Robert knows how to communicate. He can get otherwise stingy people to understand the blessing of giving. You can disagree with him about something and still leave his presence feeling good. That's motivation!

5. Tenacity. Winston Churchill famously said in the dark days of World War II, "Never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense." I believe too many people give up before they have a chance to succeed. When people say I've been successful in the media world, I remind them that I'm too stubborn to quit and that somehow I simply lasted longer than many competitors that went out of business.

One of the most tenacious men I've ever known is my good friend Scott Plakon. While others have had more adversity in their lives, Scott has survived more difficult challenges than most. I know because I've walked through some of them with him (as he's walked through challenges with me). Years ago, he helped start a company and grew it so rapidly it went public. It also had enormous problems that resulted in lawsuits and the company finally failing. Before that happened, Scott was unjustly ousted. But did he give up? No, he simply started over and began from scratch what is now a very successful

publishing company. He had to live off savings the first year because he couldn't afford to pay himself a salary.

Then he realized a lifelong dream of serving in the Florida Legislature. He quickly earned a much-deserved reputation as the strongest advocate for conservative and moral values in the legislature. The *Orlando Sentinel*, no friend of conservatives, called him "the most conservative member of the Florida Legislature," and they didn't mean it as a compliment, but Scott took it that way. He was so effective in Tallahassee that when the liberals targeted him in the 2012 election, they spent more money on that legislative race than any other in order to narrowly defeat him. Did that make him quit? No way. He saw God's hand in it, and he's running again in the adjacent district, where he formerly served and is tenaciously pursuing re-election.

6. Generosity of spirit. A leader must be a good and kind person. The old dictatorial leadership style went out with the Edsel. But a leader can't be loosey-goosey or the organization becomes like the insane asylum run by the inmates! In this new era, what is the balance—especially for those leaders who are led by the Spirit? The balance is best embodied by pastor Jack Hayford, who is known as one of the kindest leaders with the greatest integrity in the church world. In June, he will turn 80 and celebrate his 60th wedding anniversary. We are devoting most of the July issue of *Charisma* to his life's work. Many, including me, see him almost as bigger than life.

Because of my close working relationship with Jack for more than 20 years and serving on the board of The Kings University, I've seen him up close and behind the scenes. I can tell you he is the real deal when it comes to integrity. But anyone who might mistake his gentle demeanor as his being a soft leader is wrong. He knows what he wants, and he knows how to lead in order to achieve the vision. But he does it with a generosity of spirit that I've rarely seen. We need

more leaders like him.

7. Comfortable in their own skin. There are many leadership qualities that could be included in a list like this. So maybe this last item on my list will come to you as a surprise. But I feel that every leader must be confident, able to take criticism and not worry about the people who will be unhappy with any decision that's made. The leader must be comfortable in his own skin.

Every leader I've mentioned here exhibits that. But I'll mention someone who may surprise you—former President George W. Bush. We are not friends (as I am with everyone else on this list), but I felt I knew him well after publishing *The Faith of George W. Bush* in 2003. That's because I read the first draft as the chapters came in, then the final galleys, and then, after the book was a best-seller, I read it through a third time. You come away from Stephen Mansfield's biography of Bush believing he really has a genuine relationship with Jesus, that he's basically a good man despite his many flaws, and that he is comfortable in his own skin.

I also met the president three times, including one interview. Up close I saw a leader who was decisive, forceful and very much comfortable with who he was despite how the press or liberals may have tried to characterize him.

What do you think? Do you agree with these examples? Do you know any of these people, and do you agree with my analysis? What traits did I leave out? I'm interested in your opinion.

By the way, if you liked this, share it on social media. I'm trying to increase my readership and I need your help. And let me recommend to you attending a future session of Dr. Mark Rutland's National Institute on Christian Leadership. This is a partnership we've had with him for four years, and one of the four sessions wrapped up today in our offices. [Click here](#) to find out how you can participate.

Steve Strang is the founder and publisher of Charisma. Follow him on Twitter at @sstrang or on Facebook (stephenestrang).