

# Cornerstones of Effective LEADERSHIP

10 CORNERSTONES TO BUILD  
YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS



BUSINESS  
LEADERSHIP  
SERIES



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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**Nothing in life travels in a neat formation accompanied by bugles and cavalry. A lot of it shows up filthy and unkempt, prominent in the mess we've made around our foxhole.**

**These lessons are typically the offspring of hubris, naivete and ignorance ... or from overlooking the land mines hidden beneath our feet.**



# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P. Series

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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**“Some of the greatest battles will be fought within the silent chambers of your own soul.” — Ezra Taft Benson**



As a business leader, how often have you paused to wonder, “Am I a very good leader?” “Is it possible that I’m really just a ‘legend in my own mind’ and that when I turn around and look closely, not many people are following?”

Leadership is the centerpiece of our business success. We start out with what God gave us, and stumble, fall, grow, learn and build from that foundation, emboldened by our success, nurtured by our failures.

## **What does it take to be a great leader?**

Your business will not survive ... let alone thrive ... if you don’t become the best leader you can, quenching your own thirst for knowledge while nurturing successful leadership behavior around you. What does it take to be a good leader? How much is inherited, and is that all we’re going to get? Where can we go to fill in what’s missing? What if we apply the best practices that others have learned and shared?

Yes, it’s possible that we’re not quite the leaders we think we are. So, how do we measure our capability and success as leaders? If our company is making money, does that cover it? If our company is growing, have we arrived? Do we just need to look around to see if anyone is following us?

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## **Leadership definitions are limitless**

There are countless definitions, metaphors and analogies to describe Leadership, and I've probably used all of them on one occasion or another. Leadership is communication. Leadership is influence. Leadership is about achieving accountability. It's all this ... and more.

## **Inspire people to achieve a common goal**

In some form or another, leadership is about inspiring a group of people to achieve a common goal. It's measured by performance at every level ... growth, profits, longevity, turnover, succession ... and its demands can be unforgiving.

## **The libraries and bookstores are overflowing**

In many ways, leadership is a bottomless bucket of attributes, skills, qualities and characteristics that are required to move our organizations toward success. Our libraries and bookstores are chocked full with books and articles on the subject. They've been written by and from every perspective ... from classic sources like Machiavelli's *The Prince*, to Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, from the perspectives of Genghis Khan and Napoleon, McArthur and Patton. There are books with a religious perspective, sharing the leadership lessons gleaned from the teachings of Mohammed, Jesus and Buddha.

## **Who hasn't written a book about leadership?**

There are countless books from and about business leaders of every stripe ... from Alfred Sloan who built General Motors, to GE's legendary CEO, Jack Welch ... to technology leaders like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs. Academicians and consultants as well as a wide range of observers and students also fill bookshelves with their thoughts and observations.

## **What are the Building Blocks of Leadership?**

As I launch an extended discussion about leadership over the next several months, we're not going to re-create or summarize that rich body of work. You should devote time to some of those works, however, as they will provide valuable perspectives and ideas that will inform your leadership style and focus.

Instead, we're going to explore on some of the most important building blocks of leadership. I've been thinking about this a lot over the last few years, and as I've talked to CEOs, taken notes and captured my own experiences, I realize that many of these key attributes start with one of the letters in the word **L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P.**, which we'll use as a platform for our extended conversation.

# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

L

“You’ve got to give loyalty down, if you want loyalty up.”  
— Donald T. Regan

E

A

D

E



R

## L = Loyalty

S

Isn't there something almost magical about having a loyal friend? They know when we need help and even better, offer their help without our asking. They're committed to a lasting relationship with us and they inspire us with their loyalty. They don't judge us, they overlook our shortcomings, and they expect nothing in return. We have no trouble understanding that kind of loyalty.

H

### What is Loyalty?

But there are others we know as “fair weather friends,” good friends even. We enjoy their company, they're responsive when their help is sought, but they wouldn't be our first choice to join us in a foxhole.

I

What is loyalty and how important is it to successful leadership? Some philosophers think loyalty is only a sentiment; others argue that it's more of a test of conduct than an intensity of feeling. Some argue that it's a virtue; some claim that disloyalty is a greater vice than loyalty is a virtue.

P

Others argue that we must set aside good judgment to be loyal; I contend that while steadfast loyalty is a welcome quality, no individual or company should expect

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**L** mindless fealty.

## **Is Job Loyalty a Worthless Virtue?**

**E** In a serendipitous moment compliments of a recent downsizing, I recently stumbled across an Industry Week article written by a college friend, Charles Day, who went on to become its editor. It was written in 1978 (I guess I can't claim to be 39 anymore), and I kept it because he interviewed me, among others, for their cover story entitled Is Job Loyalty a Worthless Virtue. (My friend usually had higher standards for interviewees but was trying to help out his old friend, I guess.)'

**A**

## **Is there a “Loyalty Contract” between employer and employee?**

**D**

In that article, I commented on the mutuality of the loyalty contract between employer and employees. Others observers disagreed, insisting that performance was the only standard and loyal employees who didn't perform should be summarily dismissed. Yet, it turns out that mutuality is a feature of most of our loyalties, particularly as it extends to the strongest form of loyalty ... to “my” groups of families, friends, organizations, countries and religions.

**E**

## **R Loyalty is measured by conduct ... not sentiment.**

True loyalty is measured by our conduct not by our feelings. Loyalty is the fuel of commitment and the bedrock of the diligence and hard work we expect from our employees. It should be calibrated by our commitment to remain loyal in the face of hardship even when it is costly or disadvantageous to us to be loyal. We may be powerfully attracted to a concept, individual or group, but one's loyalty must be tested by adversity or may be illusory.

**S**

## **H Rally around a common purpose**

For businesses, there's tremendous loyalty associated with a common purpose. Such loyalty was the cornerstone of our own fight for liberty and equality some 235 years ago, creating a powerful bond of patriotism that inspired the vastly inferior forces of American revolutionaries. By way of a more current example, “No man left behind”, the Special Forces mantra, likewise underlies an unforgiving emotional bond that defines individual loyalty and commitment in a team environment.

**I**

## **P Sometimes powerful loyalties are in conflict**



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L

We're often torn by the hierarchy of loyalties that persist in our lives. We know, too, that loyalty can be a treacherous slope, as the Nuremberg trials following World War II demonstrated. Whistle-blowing is yet another example where loyalties are overcome by reckless, immoral or illegal behavior.

E

Work over family? God over country? Patriotism or anti-war protests? It turns out that loyalty is about values and the order in which we place them. Divided loyalties often represent our struggle over conflicting loyalties, and the shifting sands of our commitments as well as the commitment of others.

A

## **“Walk the Walk” to build a mutual loyalty program**

D

For leaders, a defined purpose offers tremendous power to inspire employee fidelity that transcends all obstacles. Often, you'll see those purposes captured in vision and mission statements, and if done thoughtfully, they'll ignite unrivaled enthusiasm and success. The [Container Store](#) is proud that it did not layoff a single person during the recession.

E

While some benefits were deferred, their philosophy of “employees first” achieved a deeply rooted loyalty between the company and its employees. They “walked the walk” and received the allegiance of their employees by directly setting the example.

R

After all, that's the root of loyalty programs that so many companies use to reward loyal shoppers with exclusive experiences, points programs and other benefits. Why not establish a loyalty program for your employees that rivals what's offered to your customers?

S

## **You earn any loyalty unless you truly give it**

H

In the end, you can't expect loyalty if you don't give it. By fostering reciprocal loyalty, business leaders bear witness to the transforming power that comes from a loyal work force inspired to reach higher and dig deeper. That kind of loyalty can't be bought but it's hard to build a great company without it.

## **What do you think?**

I

Is there a strong bond of mutual loyalty in your company? If so, how was it built and what sustains it? If it doesn't exist, why not?

P



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**“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”  
–Aristotle**



## **E = Excellence**

“Why do we even bother?” he asked. I was standing in the president’s office when the chairman and CEO walked in with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

“What are you talking about, Leonard?” the president asked calmly.

“I’m talking about this stack of credit memos. Why do we have a policy of charging these back when you just stuff them in a drawer and do nothing about them?”

As the chairman’s voice got louder, I knew I didn’t want to be in that room, but I couldn’t slip past him before he slammed the pile of credit memos on the president’s desk. The desk collapsed as it was torn from its wall emplacement. It hit the ground at a 45-degree angle and everything on the desktop slid to the floor. As the voices got even louder, I was lucky to make a hasty exit, stage left.

### **Excellence isn’t a preference nor indulgent of lapses**

Thereafter, we heard about the incident repeatedly as an illustration of what not to do in the pursuit of excellence. The chairman used that parable frequently to

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remind us that excellence is not a personal preference nor is it indulgent of lapses, sentiment or carelessness.

**L**

## **Excellence is a mindset**

More than anything, excellence is a mindset, a perspective that demands high performance, constant attention and a willingness to relentlessly pursue that elusive goal. It may conceal an unattainable demand for perfection but it doesn't settle for mediocrity.

**E**

To achieve excellence, leaders must demand excellence from their colleagues and teammates. As a business leader, you must embrace it in everything you do and make it the touchstone of your leadership style.

**A**

## **Leaders are always in the spotlight**

Jay Conger from the Center for Effective Organizations, Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, speaks about the "Spotlight of Leadership" as a reminder that leaders are always being scrutinized, their every action carefully observed, their attitude and demeanor always on display. If excellence isn't pursued when no one's looking, no one will be looking for excellence.

**D**

**E**

## **Do you regularly speak about Excellence?**

Excellence is also measured by how you speak to others. Do people hear you actively promote excellence ... or do they detect willingness to compromise when those standards are challenged? By way of example, does "on time delivery" to your customers actually mean that or is it just a sentiment that expresses what you'd like to have happen? Has any energy been expended to put policies, processes and procedures in place to accomplish it, or is it just a comforting slogan? Sometimes less than spectacular results will have to suffice, but does your team believe excellence is the exception or the rule?

**R**

**S**

## **Do you expect Excellence from others? Are they clear? Crystal?**

What do you expect from others? One of the most destructive forces of excellence is unveiled by the quality of your workforce. If there are sub-par performers tucked into every corner, a culture of excellence will be unattainable and your goals will become mere platitudes. Your most talented performers won't embrace excellence ... and probably won't stick around too long ... because there is so much evidence that excellence is optional.

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**P**

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Hold your people to a high standard and weed out those who are falling short less they become the spoiled apples that poison the entire barrel.

**L**

## **Does your writing promote Excellence or seek blame?**

We all write a lot of email and text messages these days. What does your writing sound like? Does it point the finger at others for their mediocre performance? Does it extol the virtues of achievement and performance or is it defensive and blameless? Do people perceive your guidance as positive coaching or one more “gotcha” that thrives on uncovering wrongdoing instead of promoting success?

**E**

**A**

## **“Walk the Walk” if you want others to embrace Excellence**

To be a successful business leader, you need to “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” ... both literally and figuratively ... constantly renewing your workforce with the highest performers you can find and promoting excellence at every turn. People around you can easily tell if you’re expecting excellence from yourself ... by how you talk, what you write, what you believe, how you carry yourself. If you are uncompromising about your standards, it will be self-evident.

**D**

**E**

## **Keep Excellence on the tip of your tongue this week**

So, keep excellence on your lips for the next week ... think of it every time you work on something ... make it part of everyday speech and let us know the results by commenting at [Exkalibur.com](http://Exkalibur.com). If you stay with it, you’ll find that excellence will creep into every crevice. That’s a contagion that you hope will infect your entire organization.

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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**L**

“A positive attitude may not solve all your problems, but it

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will annoy  
to make it  
effort.” –Herm

enough people  
worth the  
Albright



**A**

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**R**

## A = Attitude

**S**

There's nothing more destructive of our first two l.e.a.d.e.r.s.h.i.p. building blocks — LOYALTY and EXCELLENCE — than a bad ATTITUDE.

**H**

**A positive attitude is an unarguable characteristic of successful leadership**

Attitude is an unarguable characteristic of successful leadership and superior performance, and for many reasons. On one side, a positive attitude is a breath of fresh air to which we naturally gravitate.

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It is usually accompanied by a can-do attitude, a commitment to excellence, a desire to be a collaborative teammate, a willingness to take on new challenges in foreign environments, a general approach that sees the glass half-full rather than half-empty.

**P**

**A Positive Attitude is a magnet for Opportunity**

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**L** No challenge is too great because a positive attitude is the sorcerer of the unbridled optimism that helps us overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. It also a magnet for new opportunities and as we know, success is achieved when opportunity meets excellence.

## **E** A bad attitude is a lethal virus

**A** On the other side, a bad attitude is a lethal virus that undermines a collaborative culture. You will meet a successful executive with a bad attitude about as often as you'll see someone taking her cat for a walk. If that rare occasion occurs, be sure to run the other way because it's contagious and an unambiguous confirmation of an organization you don't want to join.

## **D** A bad attitude has a long life and great visibility

**E** A bad attitude has a long life with great visibility. Even the body language of someone with a bad attitude sours the air for everyone in the vicinity. Such individuals are always complaining, think they're the only ones getting the most boring tasks, feel under-appreciated, undervalued and underpaid; and are the last to volunteer for anything that's inconvenient.

## **What a difference a positive attitude can make**

**R** A common corollary is embedded in a phrase you've probably heard — and witnessed on many occasions: "Ask a busy person to do something and they always have time. The person with nothing to do is always too busy."

**S** That's really about the difference in attitude. Those with a positive attitude are always willing to try, to do more and to serve those around them. An individual with a bad attitude rejects anything outside of the routine and relishes the completion of his own work. He never has enough time to perform his basic tasks and avoids all else.

## **H** Attitude is very predictive of Job Performance

**I** Attitude is at the top of my list when I'm interviewing job candidates. There is no more predictive characteristic of success, and certainly no more convincing indicator of someone you want on your team, regardless of any deficiencies they may have.

**P** It's very rare to find someone with a positive attitude who isn't good at something important to your organization's success. So inevitably, that person will find a meaningful role in your organization. That one is adaptable, willing to change, go the extra mile, help out a struggling

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**L** colleague, do all of things that are the fuel of a collaborative environment.

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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

## Be careful not to destroy someone's positive attitude

Be aware, however, that it's pretty easy to extinguish a positive attitude. Those individuals most organizations tend to be the "go to" people in because they get things done. Yet, if everyone is seeking them out, they're likely to be overwhelmed, unproductive, overburdened and soon propelled by their willingness to help and serve, but an unwitting victim of their own success.



## You own your Attitude – can change it!

The good news is that attitude we own, and that we can change. Our attitude is entirely ours.

Sure, we've all blamed others for our bad attitude on occasion. But it's ours, lock, stock and barrel, as they say. We can change it, suppress it, bury it, but it's ours to control. Take charge of your attitude, and you'll find that it's the key to overcoming many of the barriers to the success you seek.

## You can't really fix a Bad Attitude in someone else

Contrarily, a bad attitude is not easily curable by outsiders, since it is usually deeply entrenched and isn't easily uprooted by corrective action, coaching or leadership changes. If you catch it early enough, you may be able to turn it around in some measure, but its foundation is complex and deeply anchored.

## Remember the "No A\*\*hole Rule"

You'll find plenty of examples in Robert Sutton's book *The No A\*\*hole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*. Don't spend too much time trying to fix a bad attitude if there's any resistance.

So, make sure you "own your attitude," and that it's a positive one. It's the best security against the evil forces that threaten your plans for world domination, and a sure route to becoming an effective leader and invaluable resource to others in your universe.

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“If you chase two rabbits, both will escape.”  
– author unknown

L

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D

## D = Discipline

E

In our Cornerstones of Effective Leadership series, we’ve covered some steadfast qualities of an effective leader: L = Loyalty, E = Excellence and A = Attitude. These are invaluable building blocks of the successful leader but little would be accomplished without this next quality.

R

### Be DISCIPLINED ... or run ragged

S

It’s never been harder to be an effective executive given the rush of information that races through our offices every day. Supplemented by the surfeit of email, social media, chat, messaging — the ability to communicate instantly and globally with customers, employees and colleagues, the data flow becomes a seductive temptress. We stay informed, communicate rapidly and respond to inquiries wherever we are in our 24/7 world. We easily succumb to the seduction because the temptress offers immediate gratification and comfort.

H

### Get rid of all the crappy stuff

I

I’ve written previously about [Steve Jobs’ conviction](#) that his most important mission is to make sure Apple decides what not to do, an axiom known as, “Get rid of all the crappy stuff.” Likewise, in the growing body of work under the heading “[What Only the CEO can do](#)“, A.G. Lafley, former CEO of Proctor &

P

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Gamble, and Peter Drucker, the legendary business author, have discussed extensively the critical role of the CEO to decide what business his company is *not* in.

## **Discipline is the only lasting antidote**

Discipline is the only lasting antidote for the onslaught of information, the oppressive communication matrix and the unending stream of other tempting interruptions that impose on our ability to work on the things that matter most. Discipline requires a sharp focus on a strategy that lights the way and a plan that allows us to relentlessly implement that strategy. It requires us to regularly turn off the spigot, break off the appendages of the inane and unimportant tasks that attach themselves to our hull and limit our attention to the “strategic handful” of those things that will make greatest impact in our personal and professional lives.

## **Ideas without plans are everywhere**

Ideas are a dime a dozen and there are hundreds of them buried in the mass of information coming at us from a myriad of sources. Many of them, maybe most of them, are good ideas and may have merit under certain circumstances, but ideas without plans are merely mind tricks to keep us distracted from the disciplined approach that will bring us success. To be disciplined, we need to differentiate ideas from plans.

## **No plans? No success!**

Successful business leaders know that planning is a critical function in their role. It isn't the tool of a soothsayer or fortuneteller. It is an invaluable instrument to organize the key activities of your business in a way that is actionable and provides a roadmap from which you can react to changing and unexpected business conditions. Implementation plans that focus on continuous improvement have been repeatedly proven to be the bedrock of successful companies. In short, it is the discipline of organized planning that creates successful businesses and helps us get rid of the crappy stuff.

## **Discipline's required to Improved Personal Productivity**

Discipline is likewise important to personal productivity, i.e., how we go about dealing with the incessant flow of demands on our time. Once again, we are fielding thousands of pieces of data every week, and we need to be disciplined to identify what's important, what's urgent, and what can wait for another day. Moreover, that discipline needs to be built into our workflow, e.g., unsubscribe from worthless email; kill off the open-door, interrupt-me-anytime policy; drop the fire-fighting gear and celebrate fire prevention; and take any other measures

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**L** required to make sure that your team and you have the time to focus on the things that are most important to your success.

## **Only you can control your agenda**

**E** Discipline is about taking control of your own agenda. You can't spend your entire day fielding questions and others can't.

**A** You discipline to insist you with solutions. Implementing a program to optimize talent acquisition is an important way to

**D** identify executives these problems without your personal intervention.

**E** Discipline isn't a demeanor nor is it a methodical approach. It informs a

**R** to identifying the most important initiatives, discarding the "nice to have" for the "need to have," getting rid of the crappy stuff and rigorously implementing your plan.

Whatever you do, don't let distractions kill off the discipline required for you to be an effective leader.

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disciplined recruiting program to optimize an important way to can help to solve without your personal

achieved by a tough isolationist or myopic. methodical approach

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**L**

**“In the Western tradition, we have focused on teaching as a skill and forgotten what Socrates knew:  
teaching is a gift, learning is a skill.”  
— Peter Drucker**

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## **E = Education**

**S**

Interestingly, this L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P. series has prompted several suggestions about what concepts I should use for some of the letters remaining in the series. I considered several candidates, as I’ve done for each column ... Élan, Enjoyment, Energy, Engagement ... and while there are a lot of worthy candidates, my objective is to select the 10 essential qualities of leadership that truly differentiate great leaders. For me, there is nothing more powerful than E = Education.

**H**

**Your own Education is only the ante**

**I**

Our first reaction to that word is usually to think about our own education, and we certainly must be committed to educate ourselves to be the best leaders possible. One of the cornerstones of successful leadership is to be a lifelong learner and continually advance our own education to become as knowledgeable and well informed as possible.

**P**

**You must become an Educator of Other People**

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**L** But, that's only the ante to get a seat at the table. To be a great leader, you need to become an educator of other people. If you accept the premise that the greatest measure of your leadership is the successful leaders around you, your primary mission must be to continually educate your team and equip them with the tools, knowledge and qualities that will make them successful leaders in their own right. That education and training includes not only content expertise leavened with some academic knowledge, but broader leadership, management and communication skills that are integrated into a complete executive development curriculum.

**A**

## **Training ... Education ... then more training**

**D**

I recently finished reading *The Finishing School* by Dick Couch, about the Navy SEAL training regimen. It covered not only the infamous BUD/S course that washes out the great majority of SEAL candidates, but also the extraordinary learning program that is the core curriculum of Navy SEAL training. The Navy SEALs spend 18 months in full-on training for every six-month deployment and for new SEALs, that training follows one of the most rigorous 12 months anyone can experience.

**E**

## **Individual Training first ... then the Team .. then the Company**

**R**

This full-time training commitment includes a broad range of individual skills training, physical fitness and tactics based on the most likely scenarios faced by combat units. Each six-month block is devoted, respectively, to individual, unit and squadron training to prepare everyone to succeed, in their individual capacities and as part of a team, under the most challenging conditions.

**S**

## **SMEs spend way too little time on education and training**

**H**

In the middle market, it seems that few companies spend enough time training their people. One exception is reflected in a very short video about the Container Store, a proud employee-centric culture that devotes eight weeks of training for each new employee. In my experience, most leaders believe it's too expensive to invest so much in training and education, opting instead for a "give them a kickstart and throw them into the deep end" approach to see who survives. The Navy SEALs employ those tactics to test the commitment of SEAL candidates, but that early "weeding out" process is never used as a substitute for training.

**I**

**P**

## **Education and Training is NOT a cost center**

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While many companies still see training and education as a cost center, leading companies realize that the more effectively their employees deal with the issues facing them, the more successful the company will become. There might not be immediate, short-term rewards, but the time devoted to training will, in the longer term, foster more knowledgeable, capable and effective leaders.



## What does it take to attract top performers?

The Best Places to Work research confirms what's required to attract and retain top performers – the assurance that they can challenge and be constantly learn new things, adopt new technologies, and modify what they believed yesterday to accommodate what's required tomorrow. I've seen no research to contradict this conclusion nor an example of superior organizations that aren't committed to continually educating their people, their teams and organizations across all the disciplines required for success.

## Educating Others creates Great Leaders and Top Performers

We can probably agree there is no substitute for hiring top talent and building the best leadership team you can assemble. When you dig a little deeper, you also realize that top talent has only achieved that status because they educated themselves, took on new challenges and never stopped learning. If you're not promoting this culture, those executives will move on to be top performers somewhere else.

So, if you want to be a good leader, educate yourself. If you want to be a great leader, educate others. Invest in your people and give them greater capabilities to be more successful in everything they do. It's the best business investment you'll ever make.

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**“Ninety-nine percent of all failures come from people who have a habit of making excuses.”  
— George Washington Carver**

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## **R = Reliable**

**R**

This concept is pretty simple, isn't it?

We expect that Sam's mom will pick up our child from school when promised ... that our salary increase will take effect as scheduled ... that our boss will fight for our marketing budget as he said he would. We expect our leaders to have our back, to be responsive, to honor their word and generally do what they say they're going to do when they say they're going to do it. It's simple ... but when it's absent, it can be paralyzing.

**S**

**“Don't worry. I'll take care of it.”**

How many times have you said to someone, “I'll take care of it,” and somehow failed to accomplish the task you assumed? It's a handy throwaway line we've all used, but if you don't take the next step to make sure that commitment is built into your workflow, it will never be honored.

**H**

**Do you keep track each time you say it?**

The challenge is that you're probably repeating that line to any number of people throughout your day ... with only good intentions, of course ... and may overlook

**I**

**P**



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that your commitment is far more memorable to each person to whom you make it than it may be to you. What's missing is your commitment to honor your promise and make sure you take the necessary action steps to get it done.

## **R.E.S.P.E.C.T. – How to Get It by Earning It**

I've exercised a modicum of literary license this week because while I believe R = Respect is an important building block of an effective leader, I've already written extensively about it. In fact, I have today released my second free e-book, R.E.S.P.E.C.T.: How to Get It By Earning It on our web site. So, maybe I earn a "Twofer" this week ... and since Respect is already in the bag ... maybe even a "Threefer" when you consider that Responsibility is at least a kissing cousin of R=Reliable.

## **Once you lose it, it may be gone forever**

Reliability presents an interesting medley. While all of us expect our leaders to be reliable, Reliability is a characteristic that once lost, may be irretrievably gone. If you develop a reputation for being unreliable, people will stop asking you for your help and support because they can't depend on you. If that happens, your tenure as a respected leader will be short-lived.

## **Keep the promises you make**

Sure, it's easy to respond ... "I'm very busy, I have a lot to do" ... "I have other more important priorities" ... but that won't fly with the people to whom you make commitments. If that's the best you've got, don't make any promises at all. Just say, "I can't do that ... I won't do that" ... or "go to someone else to have it done." The worst thing you can do is take on the responsibility and fail to deliver.

## **Pay attention to your commitments. Everyone else is!**

It's demanding to be reliable because it means that you need to get virtually everything done to which you've committed. You may have committed to provide leadership, resources, new products, funding ... bagels for this morning's meeting ... and everyone knows it.

## **Don't lose the Reliability Factor**

Even if someone only "perceives" that something needs to get done, e. g., your products are outmoded and definitely need to be upgraded, your "Reliability Quotient" will quickly dissipate when people don't see those new products being developed. Your colleagues will assume that what they've noticed by accident should be one of your core responsibilities. They will expect you to get it done

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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**L** even though you may not have made a specific commitment to do it.

## **E** Reliability is the Leadership

**A** In some ways, being many of the other leadership because depend upon you circumstances. You constituents, whether or vendors, demand because they also **D** Loyal, to pursue positive Attitude, to Educate yourself and qualities of **E** covered earlier in this



## **Heart of your Quotient**

reliable transcends essential qualities of people need to under all might say that your employees customers your Reliability — rely upon you to be Excellence, to have a be Disciplined, to your team ... the leadership we series.

Reliability becomes the linchpin of your leadership machine because without it, you can't be relied upon to consistently embrace or embody those other qualities.

## **R** Reliability is a simple concept ... but difficult to execute

**S** Reliability is simple in concept but difficult to execute ... and very difficult to recover if you miss the mark. Say what you're going to do, and do it. Don't over-promise. Keep track of all your commitments to all your constituents ... and at the earliest possible moment when you suspect that you'll fall short, reach out to explain the situation. Let them know you haven't forgotten or overlooked your commitment, that it remains **H** important and that you'll get it done as promised.

### **If you're not Reliable ... look up "oblivion"**

**I** If you miss the mark on occasion, you'll be forgiven as long as your conduct squares with a demonstrated commitment to caring about what you promise. ... And you can be counted upon to get it done. Without Reliability, you'll only lead yourself into oblivion.

**P**

# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**L**

**“You’re gonna have to serve somebody.”  
—Bob Dylan**

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## **S = Service**

**R**

Success. Solitude. Sacrifice. Satisfaction. What to do with one of the most popular letters in the English language when there are so many leadership qualities we could identify that start with “S”? A lot of tempting choices, but S = Service best expresses another inescapable quality of great leaders.

**S**

### **Are you a Servant-Leader?**

**H**

You’ve probably read something of the body of work around the servant-leader. Robert Greenleaf is generally credited with coining this term, and while he never proffered a definition, in his 1970 essay, “The Servant as Leader,” he offers this description:

**I**

*“The servant-leader is servant first. ... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions....”*

**P**

### **Start with the premise of Service**

# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**L**

In short, it is the service mentality of great leaders who recognize that their principal mission is to serve their constituents and to support their activities in every way possible. By starting from this premise, servant-leaders provide resources, counsel, direction and, yes, protection for those working to serve their organization's purpose.

**E**

## **We still struggle with a Command & Control culture**

**A**

Thirty years ago, and even today, we lived in more of a command and control culture. I freely admit I was front and center in that culture, in part nurtured by military service, but as well by the demanding and dictatorial bosses with whom I worked in my early career. My good fortune was that my next boss was the polar opposite of the previous leader with whom I served, and was the epitome of the servant-leader. He made sure that his people were supported, nurtured and challenged — but only in ways that served the individual and the organization and never in a threatening or intimidating manner.

**D**

**E**

## **We all operate in a Service business, don't we?**

**R**

This should be an easy concept to grasp since we all operate in a service business of some sort. If you have customers or clients of any type, shape or size, whether in a commercial or not-for-profit organization, serving them is your principal mission. In fact, serving all of your constituents is really the ultimate measure of your success and will reward you and your organization more than any other single thing you can do.

**S**

**H**

Companies like Zappos and The Container Store have focused on creating employee-centric cultures, and I've come to believe that the "customer first" mentality is looking through the wrong end of the telescope. The evidence is compelling that by taking care of our employees first and foremost, they will, in turn, take care of the customers and the other constituents that make our organizations run effectively.

## **Walk the Walk: You're only here to serve**

**I**

I frequently invoke the phrase "I'm only here to serve," and while it's sometimes rendered with an impish grin and a little hyperbole, it does represent the essence of our roles no matter how it's stated. Yes, it may sometimes sound a little gratuitous ... but by relentlessly validating that approach with our deeds and conduct — by walking the walk — it creates an infectious attitude that's always welcome.

**P**

# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

## Serving is not always

To serve also means you're mean that you must have an minute of the day, but it does ready and willing to serve recognize their needs don't handy doses delivered at a The test of a true leader is present, to be reliable and how to serve her team, and the extra mile to make sure her team, when, and where



## convenient

on call. It doesn't open door every mean that you stand your troops, and always come in convenient time. the ability to be disciplined about her willingness to go that she's serving needed.

## Serve your family first

So when you get up in the morning, serve your family. When you arrive at the office, serve your employees. When you're in the field, serve your customers and suppliers. Don't get run over, lose money or make accommodations that are unreasonable. Bring a positive "service" attitude as your sidekick and be willing to go the extra mile to serve everyone in your universe.

## Then, Serve your employees. They'll Serve your customers

Think "service" in your dealings with your employees and other communities, and you'll find that it empowers everyone to find ways to meet the organization's goals. As you become a better servant-leader, the people around you will notice and celebrate your service to them by extending that service mentality to your customers while delivering superior performance.

What's not to like about that kind of service?

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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**“Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself ...  
[It is] freedom from thinking of yourself at all.”  
— William Temple**

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## **H = Humility**

**E**

At this point in our Leadership series, I hope you’ve begun to think of these essential building blocks as an interlocking structure that strengthens your ability to lead. As we saw last week, for example, Reliability is one of the linchpins in the exercise and the embodiment of many of these qualities.

**R**

### **Humility is to Leadership as yeast is to bread**

**S**

There’s another even rarer seed that is not so easy to come by. You may not see it very often in the business leaders with whom you’re familiar. But as bread won’t rise without yeast, a business without a humble leader can have difficulties. So in our acronym for the building blocks of leadership, this week we explore H = humility.

**H**

### **Humility is a rare but admirable quality**

In truth, I suspect that one of the reasons I chose Humility is because it is such a rare but admirable quality. In my lifetime, no one more earnestly embodied this enviable trait than my father. As like the quote from William Temple, he judged no one (maybe his sons when they were acting up in church), and it never occurred to him that he was better than anyone else. He only saw that

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**P**

# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

he had different gifts to share but would respond not a whit differently if you stepped out of a limousine or crawled from under a cardboard shelter. (In my case, I wish the apple had fallen a little closer to the tree.)

## **Humility is a dominant thread among Level 5 Leaders**

Having a modest opinion of your importance or standing may sound like weakness to some people. Yet, humility is a dominant thread of great leaders because it is a powerful magnet to get high performers to follow you over the hill.

In a welcome stroke of serendipity, I was preparing for some upcoming meetings when I was reminded of Jim Collins' description of a "Level 5 Leader" as a "triumph of humility and fierce resolve." It's a characteristic of every single leader whose company moved from "good to great," as described in Mr. Collins' book by the same name. (Mr. Collins also emphasizes the power of D = Discipline, another of our essential leadership building blocks.)

## **Start by admitting your mistakes**

Humility makes it safe for you to admit your mistakes. People don't expect you to be perfect. Quite the contrary, your willingness to admit your mistakes reflects your humanness, your vulnerability and your similarity to everyone else who makes mistakes every day. Our peers and comrades will usually give us an extra coil of rope when we humbly acknowledge our own errors, work to fix them and do it in a nonjudgmental manner that looks in the mirror for responsibility not out the window. Even the greatest leaders are imperfect, and usually the people working for them recognize that. None of us fails to fail.

## **Then, admit you don't know it all**

Humility also means that we're willing to acknowledge that we don't know everything. We welcome talents from all corners of the realm and welcome those whose talents exceed our own. We don't sit in judgment of other people. We recognize that everyone has the potential to be a valuable contributor, and while they may not meet the standard required for a specific role, it doesn't mean there is no suitable role. We don't "judge a book by its cover" because we're willing to take the time to understand what's between the covers and won't be consumed by the colors or powerful imagery that appear on the cover.

## **Humility Enables a Penalty-Free Environment**

In our Leadership series, we've talked about S = Service. Humility and it are closely intertwined threads in the tapestry of L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P. To become a servant-leader requires humility, and it is enhanced by our willingness to serve

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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**L** others.  
**E** Humility is really the open door to a penalty-free environment where experiments and trust is a powerful success. In a penalty-admitting mistakes are welcome approach. are set aside.



action are supreme, byproduct and failure stone to greater free environment, and moving on is a Blame and judgment

**A** **After Action**

**D**

**E** **Reviews Reinforce**

**Humility**

**R** It's much like the process I described in any earlier column "Powerful After Action Reviews." The only objective is to improve future results, not finger-point about what's already happened. Without humility, there's only a closed door to this universe, behind which are hidden the demons of disappointment and failure.

**S** **Is Humility earned or granted by birth?**

**H** No one has figured out whether the "humility gene" is born or made. Mr. Collins concluded that there are "those that have the Level 5 seed and those who don't." But, that doesn't mean you can't become more humble or less judgmental, more supportive or less blameful, all of which will help pry open the doors of superior leadership and performance.

Be humble. Serve others. Excel. It is a rare but potent combination.

**I** What do you think? Is this a critical quality for you? If not, why not?

**P**

# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**L**

**“Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”**

**—Mark Twain**

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**E**

## **I = Integrity**

**R**

**S**

What would you do if you found your competitor’s customer list in your inbox one morning? Would you keep it? Would you use it? Would you destroy it? Would you return it? A tiny demon with a pitchfork, oversized ears and a red tail will be camped on one shoulder, urging you to keep it and chase down every one of them to make them your customers. Perched on your other shoulder, in a white robe with a golden halo, is your ally, I = INTEGRITY, urging you to ignore the temptation and do the right thing. She’s certain you know exactly what she means.

**H**

### **What is Integrity?**

**I**

What is Integrity? People often use it as a synonym for honesty, but it’s more than that. Honesty may be the chicken stock that brings it all together, but there are also other ingredients to consider. One portion that we’ve already discussed is R = Reliability, an immutable component because your Integrity is always in the spotlight and must be exercised consistently and without exception. It’s not an optional tool to be used only in convenient situations.

**P**

# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

## **L** Integrity may be irretrievable once it's lost

**E** Similar to Reliability, Integrity may be irretrievable after only a single breach ... but you'll need to consistently demonstrate your Integrity in challenging circumstances ... in ways that may be costly, inconvenient, and even painful ... if you want people to know you have it. It may be the most demanding characteristic of a successful leader because there's often a steep price, whether paid in financial, emotional or intellectual capital, to be a person of Integrity in the most demanding of circumstances.

**A**

## **Without Integrity, there's also no Trust**

**D** Integrity is part of the ante to get in the game. Without it, nothing else really matters. If people can't trust that you'll always do the right thing ... consistently and reliably ... you have little hope of being a successful leader.

**E** Integrity is also an integral part of building trust, and includes doses of both transparency and accountability. Transparency means a level of openness, of allowing people to see you operate in the "spotlight of leadership" and to judge you by your conduct and behavior. Likewise, being accountable for your actions is another measure of your Integrity ...

**R** owning up to your mistakes, acknowledging your shortcomings and keeping your promises. There's a strong moral compass embedded in Integrity as well, invoking those principles to strengthen and reinforce your decisions.

## **S** Who's the best boss you've ever had?

**H** Think for a moment about the best boss you ever had or the most effective colleague with whom you've worked. If they're at the top of your list, there's probably no doubt about their Integrity. You know you can trust them, that they'll act to do the right thing no matter what, and they won't be swayed by emotion, convenience or ego to do the right thing.

## **I** Yes, there will be some dicey questions

**P** Yes, there will sometimes be very dicey questions about the right thing to do. Integrity is far more demanding than simply returning a checkbook you found on the street corner. The recent movie, *The Dilemma*, posed an interesting challenge in which the character of Vince Vaughn discovered that his best friend's wife was cheating on him. Should he tell him? Is there a clear standard of Integrity between best friends? Does it require you tell

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everything? Where do you draw the line?

## How do you act when looking?

Examine your own behavior whether you act the same looking. Do you always do you waver in making the right you know exactly what it you prefer to do something know people are watching ... are the symptoms of a that can easily morph into a death knell for your



no one's

and consider way when no one's the right thing? Do decision even when should be? Would different but you so you can't? These character weakness lack of integrity, the leadership career.

## You can always choose thing!

The infamous leaders of Enron, WorldCom ... most recently, Bernie Madoff ... created a terrible impression about the integrity of business leaders. They not only didn't choose to do the right thing, they deliberately chose to do the wrong thing, a clear indictment of an insidious character flaw ... yet I'm confident there is a thread in the human character that pretty well knows the right thing to do. Successful executives lead with Integrity and don't need an interpreter to understand its probity.

The best test of Integrity is really the simplest. If you do the right thing when no one is watching, you've got it.

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# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**“The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.”  
— William Shakespeare**

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# **P = Purpose**

**E**

“What are you doing that for?” “Why are we doing things this way?” “Should we add more products or specialize in deeper categories?” “Why do we continue to invest in unprofitable customers?” “Why are we thinking about building a new plant in this dragging economy?”

**R**

## **Do you know what business you’re in?**

**S**

These are just a few of questions that arise in the course of figuring out what business you’re in. It’s also an appropriate note on which to finish our L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P. series with P = PURPOSE, which relates to not only your organization’s direction, but to your own individual purpose as a Servant-Leader.

**H**

## **What is your Purpose ... for your company as well as yourself?**

**I**

Among many consultants, the word “Purpose” is routinely exchanged with buzzwords like “Mission,” “Vision,” etc., and its power is often subjugated to those terms. In an earlier article, “Spit-shine your mission so it’s crystal clear,” I discussed the difference between Vision and Mission statements, and wrote that a “Vision Statement seeks to ‘communicate’ the core values and purpose

**P**

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of an organization, and looks to the future, to ‘what is possible’ rather than ‘what is.’ It’s more about inspiration than perspiration.”

## How does Purpose relate to your Vision & Mission statements?

In a vision statement, Purpose is often subsumed by a celebration of values. Values are critical to “how” you’ll go about realizing your Purpose ... but Purpose describes “why” you’re in business. Then, let your Mission Statement fulfill that Purpose. As I also wrote in the earlier article ... let your “Mission Statement [say] exactly what you do — now — and like a good ‘elevator speech,’ it should be recited in the time it takes you to get from the first to the 10th floor. It should use clear, muscular language to tell people succinctly ‘who you are’ and ‘what you do’. It’s what the perspiration is all about.”

## Ford Motor CEO and the 3 Most Important Traits of Leadership

In a recent interview for Chief Executive magazine, Allan Mulally, CEO of Ford Motor Company, described the three most important traits of leadership, the first of which was to define the Purpose of the organization. “What business are we in?” ... and more importantly ... “What business aren’t we in?”

What are we trying to accomplish, what values do we support and how does that form the foundation for the strategy that will get us there? Steve Jobs’ mantra of “Get rid of the crappy stuff” reminds us to sharply focus on the distractions that dilute those endeavors that truly serve your organization’s Purpose.

## Purpose requires Clarity. Clarity requires Simplicity

Purpose also requires clarity, and for me, clarity requires simplicity. Pompous-sounding vision statements obfuscate rather than enlighten the Purpose of a company and its true direction. Your Purpose must be both clear and simple so your community can easily understand it. Only then can it be transformed into a strategy that people can execute. Think about Purpose as a very concrete and specific description of your company’s direction, articulated in clear and concise language that is highly relevant to your specific business, and not a set of lofty platitudes that have universal applicability.

## How is Purpose different from Strategy?

While some people would argue that your Purpose is to create a sustainable competitive advantage, it isn’t the same thing. Purpose is of a higher order, from which the strategy flows. Think of your strategy as “what” you will pursue

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to create that sustainable competitive advantage ... informed by the values that establish “how” you will go about achieving the “why” that your Purpose directs. Go back to my earlier article, Why are you in business, to remind yourself of how important the “Why” is to your goals and objectives.

## Ask your Leadership we here?

Try starting a meeting with with this simple question: suspect it will trigger a wide and will likely reveal that of a vague mosaic than a that everyone clearly that by asking “Who am I by “How can that help me greatest value for the company’s mission?” These inevitably stimulate fresh of the various ways in which update your Purpose to meet of a challenging economy.



## Team: Why are

your leadership team “Why are we here?” I range of responses ... your strategy is more tightly-woven tapestry understands. Follow serving?” ... followed create the highest and fulfillment of the simple questions will thinking and a renewal you can modify and the current demands

## Stay tuned as we wrap up and summarize this series

Next week, we’ll wrap up our L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P. Series by summarizing the Cornerstones of Effective Leadership and see how these building blocks can be used to renew our commitment to successfully lead our companies.



# The Cornerstones of Effective Leadership

**“Men make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.”**

**—Harry Truman**



## Summary

Timing is everything, some people say, and in our public and political discourse, every talking head and political observer laments the “lack of leadership” in our political process as we lurch from one unsolved problem to the next crisis. But,

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what does that mean? What important qualities are missing when we complain of a “lack of leadership”?

## **The Building Blocks of Effective Leadership**

In our now concluded L.E.A.D.E.R.S.H.I.P. series, we covered 10 of the most important building blocks of effective leadership. It’s part of our ongoing quest to grasp the essence of leadership, and we’re not finished. I’m preparing a new, upcoming series to dig deeper to uncover more of these distinguishing qualities and will strive to continue to offer some practical ways to help you become a more effective leader.

## **How can I strengthen my leadership skills?**

You still might say, I don’t get it. I read the words, I recognize the concepts ... I truly see the value of many of these characteristics ... but in every day practice, what can I do to strengthen these muscles to become a more successful leader?

Great question. The good news is that most of these attributes are acquired habits, and work like muscle memory ... they get stronger when they’re exercised repeatedly over time.

## **Be Reliable. Be a Servant-Leader.**

You CAN become more RELIABLE by simply recognizing that it’s your responsibility to keep track of the commitments you make throughout the day, and make sure they’re honored. You can start working on that right now. You can also work on your SERVICE strengths; your willingness to be open-minded; to listen to customers, vendors and employees; and constantly strive to serve them.

## **Be Disciplined. Project a Positive Attitude.**

You can become more DISCIPLINED by focusing on the things that distinguish your success, by cutting out all the crappy stuff, as Steve Jobs says, and making sure that you’re paying attention to the right things. You can have a positive ATTITUDE ... because your Attitude is one thing you can absolutely and

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fully control. Your attitude is yours to own and yours alone, so you can make a big difference by bringing a positive Attitude to everything you do.

**Be Loyal. Educate. Pursue Excellence. Seek a Higher Purpose.**

You can be LOYAL to people. You can stand up for them under difficult circumstances and support them when they're not in the room. You can EDUCATE yourself ... and likewise educate your team by focusing on learning and training experiences that both encourage their individual growth and advance the goals and objectives of the organization. You can pursue EXCELLENCE with a vengeance, demanding it at every turn, never turning your back on it. You can make certain that your company has a definable PURPOSE that everybody understands ... and that your vision, mission and strategy are well aligned to the explicit Purpose you have helped to define.

**Integrity & Humility may be more innate ... but you CAN make progress**

Yes, it's true ... some of these qualities are harder to sharpen. Most people would agree that you either have INTEGRITY or you don't. Yet, you have countless opportunities ... every day ... to strengthen it whenever you recognize that you're not exercising the muscles of honesty, accountability and transparency. That's something you CAN do, and others' view of your performance may be modified as they see these changes in you over time. HUMILITY is likewise is a difficult quality to create, but you can put your ego in the closet, think about how to Serve others ... and a more natural humility may become a more central part of your character.

**Keep this checklist handy and work on one of them every day**

You can download a copy of the graphic, above, that identifies these 10 Cornerstones of Effective Leadership. If nothing else, keep this simple checklist where you can easily see it and regularly reflect on how you can strengthen these characteristics. Work on one of them every day to improve your leadership effectiveness. Keep each of them front and center ... and if you find that you may have slipped, grab one of these handy barbells and exercise those muscles, and thereby activate your renewed commitment to improve your leadership effectiveness.

**Which are the most powerful tools in your arsenal?**

Which of these are the most powerful tools in your arsenal? Which of them are the most difficult for you to activate? What's missing when you consider the phrase, "lack of leadership?"

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