

ABCs of Leadership

By Harvey Mackay

As children, we played "follow the leader" for hours on end. The crazier the route and antics, the more we liked it. Being the leader was the best part.

As working adults, "follow the leader" takes on a whole new meaning. Leadership is an art and a skill. It's hard work that is extremely rewarding and occasionally completely thankless. What traits make a great leader? These are my thoughts:

A is for accountability. When President Harry Truman said "The buck stops here," he was demonstrating that he was willing to take the blame along with the praise. Leaders accept responsibility for their actions as well as those that report to them.

B is for boundaries. Effective leaders respect personal and professional boundaries. In other words, they never expect their followers to do something they would not do themselves.

C is for courage. Tough times and tough choices require courageous leaders. Doing the right thing instead of the easy thing is a mark of courage.

D is for decisions. Good decision-making skills are priceless. Remember, not making a decision is a decision in itself.

E is for enthusiasm. A leader must be enthusiastic about their job. My mantra: Do what you love, love what you do, and you'll never work a day in your life.

F is for fearless. Leaders should adopt Franklin Roosevelt's philosophy: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Leaders must not be afraid to be bold.

G is for growth. This includes your growth as a leader, your employees' growth to reach their potential and your company's growth to achieve goals.

H is for heart. A good decision must factor in the human element. When your head and your heart say the same thing, you can bet it's the right answer.

I is for influence. Leadership doesn't mean getting people to do their jobs; it means getting people to do their best.

J is for judgment. A leader must demonstrate consistently good judgment in order to set the standard for the organization. Followers depend on consistent, level-headed judgment.

K is for knowledge. No one expects leaders to know everything, but everyone expects leaders to know whom to ask when they don't have the information at hand.

L is for learning. Always be learning something -- lifelong learning is an important attribute for a leader.

M is for mentor. Just as you needed some help to get to the top, offer your expertise to the next generation of leaders.

N is for new. Never be afraid to try something new, even if the old way isn't broken. The results might be better than you expected.

O is for organization. This is a two-fer: your personal organization and the organization you lead. Your office may be a disaster area, but make sure your mind is organized. The organization you lead should always be foremost on your list of priorities.

P is for people person. You are leading people.

Q is for quick-thinking. A leader must be able to think on the spot, even if the answer is "we need to give this more thought." A leader can figure out the difference.

R is for recognition. Be sure to heap recognition on those who have worked hard and achieved. Sharing the credit doesn't diminish you, it demonstrates your ability to hire well and acknowledge achievement.

S is for strength. A strong leader never waivers on values, ethics or commitment. That's a very tall order, but absolutely essential.

T is for team-builder. Whether you are a team of two or two thousand, as a leader you are also cheerleader-in-chief. "Go, team, go" only works if you provide the right environment.

U is for ubiquitous. Your presence and influence must be felt everywhere. Make sure the team knows whom to follow.

V is for visible. Not only should your presence be felt, you should be personally present at events large and small. Get to know your staff beyond their working titles.

W is for wisdom. No one is born wise, but some people learn faster than others what makes an organization tick.

X is for example. (I'm not a good speller.) If you want people to follow the leader, you must set a proper course. Inspire those you lead with your example.

Y is for yeoman's service. A leader has to be willing to work harder than everyone else in the organization. Adopt a servant mentality to be a truly effective leader.

Z is for zest. Let your passion show, and see if it isn't contagious!

Mackay's Moral: Take the lead and be a superstar!

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