



The Politics of Hope Newsletter

*“Helping Ordinary Citizens Become
Extraordinary Public Leaders”*



10 Qualities of an Effective Leader

By Donna Zajonc

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Until now I have avoided joining the “list” genre that dominates current best selling book titles. You know the drill: Four Things You Must Do to Succeed or Seven This or That or Eight Ways to Catch the Perfect Whatever. I recently read Dr. Willis Watt’s list of characteristics he believes make a positive contribution to effective leadership. It is the best list I have seen and decided it is worth sharing with you.

What I like about his inventory of leadership qualities is that it includes both the soft (heart) and hard (head) stuff. It also builds upon the idea that as leaders we must both abide by the rules and challenge the rules at the same time. His suggestions begin with the least and build toward what he believes are the most important.

10. Follow procedures and adhere to policies: Leaders are also good followers and know the written and unwritten rules of the organization. They know that following the basic rules keeps them aligned with the organization. Leaders are watched for their loyalty to the group and understand that they are accountable to those in authority.
9. Submit to the authority of others: Similar to #10, we are always under the authority of someone whether it is a direct boss, board of directors, community by-laws or a higher power. Believing we are a lone wolf is not a good idea. Actually accepting this idea liberates us and gives us more freedom to create.
8. Take risks: Leaders know they must be innovate and know when it is time to try a new procedure or policy. For many, taking risks is frightening and the fine edge of leadership is knowing when to follow the rules and when to challenge them.
7. Commitment: Any person who assumes leadership must be committed to the group. The group’s vision and mission must be internalized by the leader and our self-identity becomes part of the group identity. If we don’t have loyalty to the group, others know it immediately.
6. Be proactive: Individuals who assume leadership must be forward thinking and action oriented. It’s not enough to talk about good ideas. Leaders must know how to formulate action and follow through.
5. Expect conflict: An effective leader views conflict as an opportunity to bring differences to the table. Learning to manage conflict in a productive manner is an essential leadership trait.
4. Tell the truth but with compassion: This is where leadership becomes a huge challenge. Many people are able to tell the truth but do so with vengeance or anger. Once conflict begins, a leader must be able to differentiate between the conflict and their personal investment in a given situation. When we do this, we are able to tell the truth without blame and move toward action that serves the organization.
3. Listen: I have written more about listening skills as the foundation of leadership than any other quality. Until recently, leaders interpreted good communication skills as their ability to communicate their vision and give clear direction. That’s only half the challenge. Deeply listening to others lets them know they are valued, encourages creativity and innovation, and the leader actually learns something! As a result of



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listening, personal relationships are nurtured and members of the team feel more valued and confident of their role.

2. Love people: This quality is what sets Watt’s list apart from others. It is still considered “soft” to speak about love in the workplace. Loving in this context means that we acknowledge the value of our co-workers and respect them with the dignity they deserve. We let them know we care for them whether we like them or not. The bottom line is that we must value people and our relationships with them if individuals are to claim their authority to lead.

1. Check your attitude. I often write about our “leadership mindset” so I wasn’t surprised that Dr. Watt lists attitude as his top leadership quality. He states, “I believe leadership begins with a correct mindset which is founded in a willingness to lead and serve others. An effective leader desires the opportunity to step-up to influencing not only one’s actions but that of those being led. They feel compelled to lead no matter the personal cost.” He stresses that we are in service to others and that we seek to influence rather than dominate. Our mindset is constant learning and enlarging our understanding rather than a fixed attitude that says “we’ve always done it this way.”

Dr. Watt has gotten a lot right in this list. He starts with the most basic idea---that we are all part of groups and organizations and must first understand our role as a follower. By adhering to the organization’s boundaries, we build our credibility. As we build the platform of credibility and accountability, we build influence to question authority and take risks. As we take risks and continue forward motion we will inevitably discover conflict. As the conflict comes to the surface, we see it as an opportunity to leverage diversity and leap to the next level of performance.

It is interesting to me that the top four qualities are about telling the truth, listening, loving and keeping our minds open to learn. The top qualities on Dr. Watt’s list are not about knowing the most about the product or the budget or being the expert. The organization’s experts may never rise to the highest level of leadership without understanding compassion, listening, keeping an open mind and fully respecting others.

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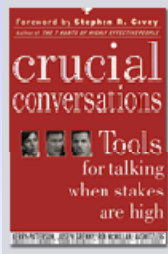


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On Donna’s Night Stand



Crucial Conversations

By: Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler and Stephen R. Covey

"The heart of all good relationships is having one successful conversation after another. *Crucial Conversations* shares simple and doable strategies for turning tough conversations into successful ones. It is one of the

Amazon.com

top two books that I most often recommend to my clients."

"My gratitude list for 20089 has Donna Zajonc at the top. As my coach, she was instrumental in my business success which tripled revenue since its inception. Her positive encouragement and concrete ideas moved me forward to great success. She pushes me to excel where I am strong and helps me avoid pitfalls that have plagued me in the past. I highly recommend her assistance."

*Pamela S. Erickson, Owner
Public Action Management*

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