

## 5 Essential Leadership Qualities That Strengthen Your Influence

By Ann N. Gatty, Ph.D.



In this article, I list five essential leadership qualities that I wish I had learned earlier in my career. Some of you reading this may be first time executives, or professionals who have recently changed jobs. Some of you may be business executives trying to rev up your employees. You may be entrepreneurs trying to boost your persuasive sales skills with clients. For whatever reason, you are trying to be more influential around the people with whom you are dealing.

I always think of a successful leader as someone who can provide solutions to unique problems in a consistent manner. I've found such capability comes from years of practice. Yet, it goes without saying, that the smart leaders are ones who continually work on improving their skills, knowledge and abilities. However, I have found that there are certain qualities of leadership that really solidify one's influence in the workforce. These intertwined characteristics are what I consider to be essential leadership qualities that act as the foundation upon which other leadership attributes can be built.

### Model Excellence

Because of the fast pace of the world in which we live, it is not unusual to settle for less than our best. It may be that getting things done and shipped to our client on time and under budget is the mantra that you find yourself following. But is there a more powerful way to be influential? How can you maintain high standards and get work completed in an efficient manner? It starts with you.

How are you maintaining high standards? How are you perceived in the workplace? The quality of your work is a direct reflection of your capabilities and competencies. In addition, modeling excellence from yourself will influence your ability to require such standards from others. Requiring excellence from yourself and others sends a powerful message about the quality of the company. People like to be a part of a winning team. Excellence is a part of such a team.

### Practice self-discipline

Smart, successful leaders model honesty and integrity in the face of adversity. They know that people are watching. Facing difficult, uncomfortable situations and handling them with a straight forward, objective approach often takes a type self-discipline. After all, isn't it be easier to ignore the unpleasantness? However, no one said that leadership is easy. Practicing self-discipline provides consistency for your workforce. The members know what to expect daily, and come to respect that there is no roller coaster of emotions and that you are following the same set of rules you set for others.

Establishing a set of rules that applies to everyone is so important in establishing trust. Practicing self-discipline makes you more approachable to your co-workers. It is the unexpected outburst of emotions, or

excuse making for why time management doesn't apply to you, that can destroy any camaraderie in a company culture, and torpedo the level of productivity.

Staying disciplined with your use of time affects your company's bottom line. So is getting work to your client at an expected time in an expected manner. Your consistent performance will keep them coming back.

## Value commitment

The quality of showing and valuing commitment to yourself, to employees, to clients and to the work you perform can make or break an organization. Valuing the commitments that you make communicates that people can count on you and your word is as good as a written contract. Being committed to something or someone indicates a belief that you hold. If you are committed to a product or service that your company offers, then you believe in the worthiness of it. When you believe in your workforce, you show that belief by being committed to them and the work that they do.

Breaking a commitment is synonymous with losing respect. A broken commitment means that the aspect of the commitment doesn't matter or is unimportant. Valuing commitments can be difficult at times because time, money and life can get in the way. But in the end, your word is your honor. Value commitment sends a powerful message.

## Show gratitude

Saying thank you cannot be over stated. Employee engagement is boosted when you show that as a leader you care about them, and respect the contributions they make at work. Showing gratitude communicates that you notice the world around you and are not living on autopilot. As a leader, you cannot accomplish the company mission alone—it takes a team. The company is only as good as its people.

Being in the people business will bring dividends. Taking time to send an email to someone who has done a good job; posting thanks in the company newsletter; mentioning people by name in a company meeting: or sending a letter of thanks to a vendor who provided excellent service—will be remembered long after the occasion.

Showing gratitude keeps everyone in a more positive mood. There is enough turmoil in lives and attitudes can sour if there is no recognition. Put a smile on someone's face today. Say, "thank you for a job well done."

## Be adaptive

Smart, successful leaders listen. Every work culture is different. By becoming a participant-observer, you can learn the unwritten rules and adapt to the culture more effectively. Not only does the workplace culture change based on the economic climate, the culture changes with staffing and work changes. The workplace is always evolving and the relationship with clients is always dynamic. Being adaptive to the changes that are certain to occur allows leaders to avoid getting stuck in the status quo. Being adaptive allows for a comfort level with change and encourages opportunities for innovation.

My experiences as a leader range from administering non-profit organizations, teaching in a classroom, captaining a sports team, being a mom, starting several businesses, and being a thought leader. Yet, if I had

learned these 5 essential leadership qualities earlier in my career, the past might have been easier with less bumps along the way. The path of leadership is a learning process, never complete, but always open to new possibilities. Here are strategies that can accelerate your leadership influence among others in your world.

## Skill boosters you can implement today

- Keep a journal. Notice those around you who are in leadership positions, or show an expertise that guides others. In your journal notes, describe who you notice as quality leader and why? Who have you noticed that you do not want to follow? Are they exhibiting specific qualities that you would like to add to your skill set?
- Reconnect with your passion. As children, we played certain games and activities that we really enjoyed. As you matured, responsibilities may have taken you away from activities in which you excelled and in which you found the greatest pleasure. Were you always, writing, or reading, or drawing, or building things? Are any of these activities in some way a part of your daily work? For example, an architect probably enjoyed drawing as a child. I liked problem solving as a child. I still include problem solving in my work today. When possible do what you like doing when you can.
- Beef up your communication skills. Communicating well is extremely important for a leader. The communication skills you use vary depending on the situation. In difficult inter-personal conflicts, you may need to show compassion, empathy and objectivity. In other situations with stress, humor may be called into play. Check out advice from my colleague, Margo Myers, at her website, [Margo Myers Communications](#). Her years as a TV anchorwoman provide her with perspectives that make her a communications expert.
- Practice the art of leadership outside of your work environment. Leadership qualities are transferable among many different environments and situations. Being comfortable in your own skin as a leader will provide you with the poise and confidence to shine in many opportunities. You also can notice which leadership qualities are foundational for your personality, and as you practice and expand your leadership capabilities, you will be building your unique leadership brand. There is room in this world for many types of leadership brands, and each can contribute making our world a better place.

If you think that improving your leadership competencies is something that you or someone you know might find beneficial, contact us at [StrategicPeopleSolutions.com](#) and request a [Free Success Conversation](#). You also can join the conversation over at our Facebook group, [StrategicThinkingSummit](#). I believe everyone has a set of unique talents that is waiting to be unleashed for the benefit of those you serve.

## About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business success expert. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. She is frequently featured in the media and contributes blog posts for [www.AllBusiness.com](#), [www.MarketingInsiders.com](#), and [www.WomenOnBusiness.com](#). Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.



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