



**WSBA President
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What Makes a Leader?

Philosophers going back to Socrates and Plutarch have pondered the question of the qualities or attributes that make a good leader. There is no easy answer. A simple Internet search of the word “leadership” demonstrates that there are numerous definitions and theories of leadership. *A well-accepted, although perhaps simplistic, definition of leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”*¹



Some very famous historical figures have offered other definitions or observations as to leadership or leadership skills. Dwight Eisenhower stated, “Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.” Theodore Roosevelt stated, “The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it.” Henry Kissinger said, “The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been,” and Sam Rayburn said, “You cannot be a leader, and ask other people to follow you, unless you know how to follow, too.”

As for theories as to what makes a good leader, they range from the belief that individuals are born with leadership traits, to the belief that leaders are made, not born. Although I recognize that some people may be so-called “born leaders” and have certain characteristics that could predispose them to being a leader, my experience persuades me that being an effective leader takes more than genes. If you have the de-

sire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience.²

By education and training, I am not a philosopher or sociologist or any other type of academician or teacher. I appreciate that better-educated

and trained people than I have researched and studied leadership and have come up with theories as to what makes an effective leader. I don’t pretend to be familiar with the myriad of research on this subject. It is not my intent to provide you here with the textbook answers to this age-old debate. I just want to share with you my observations over my life and career.

For those of you who can remember the 1980s, it was a time of human awareness, self-analysis, and attempting to understand the human psyche. Self-help programs were prevalent and people were on a search to better understand not only themselves, but those around them. I participated in several motivational programs, and one of the things we spent a great deal of time looking at were the four personality types: **Promoters**, **Controllers**, **Analyzers**, and **Supporters**. Most of us are a combination of two or more of these types, having one more dominant than the others. We are all somewhat familiar with personality types, but just as a refresher, here are my definitions:

Promoters are dynamic, often dramatic

individuals who love to have a good time and convince people to go along with them because it is going to be fun and where the action is. If it doesn't work out, something else can always be tried. They aren't necessarily the best at following through.

Controllers like to tell people how to do things and can convince anyone, anywhere, to do almost anything. They can complete almost any task by sheer determination. They have excellent powers of persuasion.

Analyzers are great at assessing each and every situation and figuring out the correct way to get something done, but it sometimes takes them a while to complete their analysis and get moving.

Supporters tend to be encouraging of others and go along with the game plan. They don't rock the boat. They also are nurturing and are great team players. They tend to be very good listeners.

A common belief was that leaders had to have a combination of the Promoter and Controller personalities. Leaders had to be dynamic and high-energy and have the ability to persuade. It was believed by many that this was the way to motivate people; to lead them. I don't believe this is necessarily

true. Leaders possess a wide range of personality traits and come from a variety of diverse backgrounds.

So all of this beats around the bush but doesn't answer the central question: what are the attributes of a great leader? According to Toole, they center around the ability

ourselves we are not leaders because we are not as dynamic or as analytic as someone else, but if the truth were told, sometimes the quiet ones are the most respected and most effective leaders.

Leadership is best determined by the work ethic, heart, and commitment of an individual, combined with genuine respect for others and a willingness to be wrong, admit our mistakes, and learn from them. One can do more to influence and motivate people to action by rolling up his or her sleeves and directly attacking problems. The formula for getting results, especially long-term results, is not to artificially and temporarily promote and manipulate people to action. *The way to get results is to be accountable and to lead by example.* Don't ask people to do what you are unwilling to do yourself. Respect the



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to get the job done. The most effective leaders have the support and respect of a great many people who want to assist in and be part of the accomplishment of stated goals. A leader can have any one or any combination of the four above described personality styles. There is no "right" or "wrong" personality type. Many of us hang back and tell

people with whom you are working. Trust them and allow them the room and opportunity to trust themselves. Through your respect and patience, empower them each to be leaders and they will do the right thing. They will both get results themselves and they will lead others into getting results. The synergy will benefit us all.

Leadership is not limited to those serving as CEOs, presidents, chairs, officers, or governors. Leadership is relative to small groups as well as large ones. We have a great need for leaders and leadership, not only in our communities, but in our Bar Association. This leadership role is not limited to high-profile, high-energy people. *Any of us who accept that we are accountable for what happens in our lives and who are committed to make a difference have the requisite attributes of a leader.* Don't assume that your actions go unnoticed because you aren't in a highly visible position. Believe that you are a leader and lead your life with the accountability of a leader. Your actions will be noticed and you will make a difference. SM

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NOTES

1. Northouse, Peter G., *Leadership Theory and Practice* (3rd ed.) Sage Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, (2007).
2. Jago, A. G., "Leadership: Perspectives in Theory and Research," *Management Science*, 28(3), 315-336, (1982).

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