

# Blueprint for Leadership - How to Be a Better Leader

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If you were to build a house, you would begin with a blueprint. This blueprint proves useful because it contains more than directions on how to build a house. It also describes the finished house. **So, what does this have to do with leadership?**

Last month I asked an audience of leaders to tell me the characteristics of an ideal leader. Their answers were (in the order collected):

*A good listener, enthusiasm, passion, shows appreciation, a visionary, role model, trusting, integrity, organized, knowledgeable, credibility, persuasive, charisma, team building, clarity of purpose, problem solver, attitude of service, leads by example, patience, willing to act without complete knowledge, understands followers, consistent, empowers other people, and adapts to change.*

I'll add that this is essentially the same list that I receive from other audiences when I ask this question. From this come some useful insights.

**1) Notice what the list contains.** All of these characteristics relate to the human side of leadership. That's interesting because I often hear people minimize this side of leadership with terms like "soft" or "touchy feely." Actually, applying these characteristics requires more strength than not.

**2) Notice what the list excludes.** Absent from this list (and all lists from other programs) are characteristics such as stern, mean, serious, short tempered, vindictive, tough, angry, harsh, punitive, controlling, violent, or ruthless. And that's interesting because many popular representations of leadership emphasize at least one of these "hard" characteristics. In fact, these characteristics are the refuge of those who lack the strength (or the skills) to apply the human side of leadership.

**3) How about you?** How would you rate yourself as a leader compared to the list of positive characteristics? If you were to survey the people who report to you, how would they describe your leadership? Would they list characteristics from the "soft" list or from the "hard" list? Could you become more effective by improving upon any of the "soft" characteristics?

**And how about the other leaders in your organization?** Do they truly maximize human potential? People want leaders who treat them with genuine compassion, courtesy, and respect. They want leaders who help them become more successful. They want leaders who inspire them with a vision for a better world and show them how to go there.

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